THE CROSS-CURRENTS OF EXILIC STORYTELLING:

MULTILINGUAL MEMORY AND THE MARITIME SHIFT

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the discursive practices of multilingual communities in the novels of seven contemporary women writers: Marie-Célie Agnant, Gabriella Ghermandi, Gisèle Pineau, Erminia dell'Oro, Assia Djebar, Aḥlām Mustaghānamī, and Huda Barakāt. Each of these postcolonial authors evokes the sea linguistically, stylistically, and thematically through diverse articulations of exile and belonging. Across three chapters, I pair linguistically disparate texts to explore the negotiation of language politics and mobility as a means of resisting canonical cultural memory. From Italian to French to Arabic, the project is an intervention in discussions of world literature with attention to oral storytelling as a means of constructing a sense of belonging out of the experience of exile. I develop this intervention along the intersecting axes of history, identity, and language. First, I take up the refraction of colonial histories through the circulation of the sea and of collective memory. Then, I explore a destabilization of identity stemming from cultural métissage and the storyteller's subversion of border spaces. Finally, I explore disruption between languages, dialects, and registers occurring in interactional contexts at the juncture of urban and maritime. Throughout each chapter, I contend that reading the sea itself as a creative frame most closely reflects the spirit of

mobility at play in each novel. The project overall proposes a practice of reading "comparative seas" in Mediterranean and Caribbean studies to illuminate other texts situated at maritime margins and to orient literary study away from the fixity of geographical determinism.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Tami Olds, with love

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter of her autobiography, *Volevo diventare bianca*, French-Algerian author Nassera Chohra describes her experience as a tourist in Italy. Traveling with a friend, Chohra crosses the French border into Ventimiglia and arrives in the coastal city of Sanremo, where she is approached by two men. She writes:

> Ci fermammo sul lungomare a decider il da farsi.
> « Where do you come from? Do you need some help? » Il ragazzo che si era avvicinato aveva un viso pulito e un gran bel sorriso.
> « Non, merci. Je ne comprend pas. Nous sommes françaises… »
> « Ah, oui, bien… »
> Il nostro nuovo amico si chiamava Carmine, e sia lui che il suo compagno, Enrico, parlavano discretamente il francese. Dopo pochi convenevoli ci invitarono a fare un giro con loro. Erano due ragazzi tranquilli, ben educati e simpatici, così decidemmo di accettare. Destinazione: Dolceacqua, un paesello medievale a pochi chilometri da Sanremo.
>
> (We stopped at the seafront to decide what to do.
> "Where do you come from? Do you need some help?" The young man who approached had an honest face and a very nice smile.
> "No, thank you. I don't understand. We're French…"
> "Ah, yes, okay…"
> Our new friend was called Carmine, and both he and his friend, Enrico, spoke French rather well. After a few pleasantries they invited us to take a ride with them. They were two quiet young men, well-mannered and nice, so we decided to accept. Destination: Dolceacqua, a medieval paesello a few kilometers from Sanremo.)[1]

Much has been written about Chohra's autobiography, examining the circulation of mobilities across generations and geographies within the text: Naci's parents' immigration to France from Algeria, the (in)accessibility of (white) French spaces to a woman of color, and her identity as a tourist in the Sahara and in Italy.[2] This passage is striking for how it highlights the circulation of languages occurring in the liminal space

[1] Nassera Chohra, *Volevo diventare bianca*, 125. Translation is mine.
[2] Stephanie Malia Hom, "Set into motion: Identity and mobility in Nassera Chohra's *Volevo diventare bianca*," *The Italianist* 29 (2009): 425.

of a boardwalk, a constructed border between land and sea designed to serve a particular sort of mobility: that of the tourist. The first grand hotel in Sanremo, the Grand Hotel Londra, was opened in 1861 and was one of many establishments marking the city as an international tourist destination on the Italian Riviera. Sanremo's reputation for attracting tourists is confirmed in Carmine's decision to greet Naci in English, rather than Italian or French, and to address her as a foreigner. His questions presume her mobility and her lack of familiarity with Sanremo.

The linguistic detours in the passage only seem to underscore the fluid dynamics of the conversation. A variety of factors in Naci's exchange with Carmine fundamentally destabilize geography and national borders, traditional arbiters of linguistic standardization and the myth of the native speaker. For one, Naci responds to the address in French, and the conversation subsequently shifts from English to French. This excerpt includes the incorrect conjugation of the verb comprendre that is only discernible in writing. Using "je ne comprend pas" in lieu of "je ne comprends pas" does not impact the pronunciation of the verb, and it is possible that an Italian reader would not pick up on this mistake. What is the purpose of "je ne comprend pas"?

If it is an editorial error, it may well reflect larger issues related to the editing, marketing, and publication of this text. Chohra is a native French speaker who acquired Italian as an adult. As a non-native speaker, she enlisted the help of an Italian journalist, Alessandra di Sarro, to correct her grammar in Italian. As Parati annotates in her essay, "Looking Through Non-Western Eyes," Di Sarro took extensive liberties with the work, restructuring the episodes, reordering them, with the justification that the book would sell better if it was organized in a linear fashion.[3] The book was published according to Di

[3] Graziella Parati, "Looking Through Non-Western Eyes," *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation and*

Sarro's changes – not only grammatically but structurally - and Chohra was displeased with the outcome. If this is an editorial error, is it the mistake of an Italian editor, "correcting" the French? That is certainly a strong possibility. The fraught editorial history of this book brings us back to this question of understanding, of incomprehensibility, and of the power relation between an editor and a writer.

If, on the other hand, "je ne comprend pas" is an intentional choice on Chohra's part, it occurs during a moment of incomprehensibility, an interaction in which two people strive to be mutually understood across three languages. Grammatical accuracy – borne out of a standardization of the language – is only relevant to interactions between interlocuters insomuch as it impacts communicative competence. Language is a social process and not a fixed system, and as such form is only relevant in context. Chohra's excerpt takes place in the transitional space of a Mediterranean *lungomare* between English, French, and Italian, where we conceptualize language, translation and understanding as constantly redefined through interactions between speakers.

Reading Chohra's autobiography through the lens of fluctuating border spaces – a coastal city in the Mediterranean, a tourist destination, a boardwalk – allows us to think about the circulation of language, the way it is played with, uncodified and exchanged, in contexts of interaction. In this project, I apply this multilingual reading strategy to the novels of seven women writers, analyzing a specific kind of interaction – that of the storyteller and the listener. In doing so, I argue that Mediterranean and Caribbean studies can be brought together on the basis of examining the perpetual exchange and circulation of language that occurs in and around maritime spaces.

I have chosen to focus on the novel for the same reason as scholar Rebecca

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Immigration in the New Europe, 122-24.

Walkowitz, whose book *Born Translated* considers the novel to be the most international genre of literature, establishing its status in reference to the unprecedented number of books translated and circulated globally today. Walkowitz's "born translated" works highlight the disconnect between language and geography, existing in various places and languages and for various audiences. This disconnect discourages any one reader from assuming that the novel is written for them, or that the language they are reading intrinsically belongs to them.[4] Through an analysis of texts born translated, Walkowitz presents multilingualism as a characteristic of the modern novel, shifting away from erroneous imaginings of the genre as representative of a monolingual (national) literary tradition. She also questions the notion of a monolingual literary language, citing M. M. Bakhtin's argument that the national voice of any European literary tradition "in fact involves the explicit and implicit negotiation of several different regional languages as well as all versions of language (poetic, ordinary, official)."[5] Translation, in Walkowitz's introduction to her book, frames texts as "still arriving," language "on its way" from another context, imbuing literature with a past and a future.[6]

My project is primarily concerned with the contemporary postcolonial novel, acknowledging that the multilingualism present in each of these texts is often explicitly

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[4] Rebecca Walkowitz, "Introduction," *Born Translated*, 7.

[5] "To approach the future of classification from the history of multilingual circulation is to recognize that anglophone writing operates in many languages, even when it appears to be operating only in English. The novel theorist M. M. Bakhtin made this point long ago, when he argued that the "unity of a literary language is not a unity of a single, closed language system, but is rather a highly specific unity of several 'languages' that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other." See Walkowitz, *Born Translated*, 23-25, citing M. M. Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel."

[6] This argument speaks to a similar argument put forth by Sandra Naddaf in "*1001 Nights* as World Literature," per her claim that "sustained translation activity also authenticates *Alf Layla wa Layla* as a work of world literature, one that depends upon translation and its passage in translation as the mode for its continued existence." (489) Naddaf in turn is indebted to Walter Benjamin's theory of a text's afterlife, defined in "The Task of the Translator." Interestingly, the etymology of "Überleben" is not temporal as it is in the English "afterlife", which encourages us to view translation as "exceeding" the original but not in the dichotomy of before vs. after. See Edmund Chapman's "Afterlives: Benjamin, Derrida, and Literatures in Translation," 2016.

the result of linguistic imperialism.[7] Each interaction has the potential to circulate trauma and reiterate colonial oppression. Translation, per Walkowitz's argument, suspends both text and language through a continuous "arriving," which in a postcolonial context can be traumatic. The insidious nature of translation is in the knowledge that language carries both communication and culture.[8] In an oft-cited excerpt of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, Frantz Fanon writes that "le colonisé se sera d'autant plus échappé de sa brousse qu'il aura fait siennes les valeurs culturelles de la metropole" and cites the role of Senegalese interpreters in the French colonial army as emblematic of this internalization of the colonizer's cultural values.[9] Language is intrinsic to this dialectic between colonizer and colonized; Fanon describes the instrumentalization of translation to convey colonial orders and further the imperial project. The postcolonial novel, per Walkowitz's framework, is born translated and multilingual. Through the process of decolonization, the novel proposes the possibility of other realities and linguistic variations – still in the process of being formed - through the rejection or subversion of the colonial language.[10] This can be seen, for example, in Chohra's nonstandard conjugation of the French verb *comprendre* during a moment of linguistic incomprehensibility in *Volevo diventare bianca.* That Chohra chooses to use Italian, a language she acquired as an adult, instead of French as the primary language for her memoir, is an even clearer example of how postcolonial authors grapple with colonial languages.

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[7] This is not to erase the number of dialects spoken in these communities; rather, the authors have chosen to focus on the power dynamics between specific languages / language varieties.

[8] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 12.

[9] Franz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, 16.

[10] "The control over language by the imperial centre – whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a 'standard' against other variants which are constituted as 'impurities', or by planting the language of empire in a new place – remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. Language provides the terms by which reality may be constituted […]" See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, eds., "Introduction to Part Ten: Language," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 206.

There is an inherent engagement with translation in postcolonial literature and integral to this discussion are questions of identity, authority and accessibility. Who is speaking? Who has the right to speak? Who is being spoken to? Who has access to what is being said? The answers to these questions are unfixed. In this project, I think about how the sea as a conceptual site contributes to this lack of fixity: the circulation of bodies, letters and memories along trade routes, the postcolonial subject's repeated encounters with colonial history throughout her life, and the shifting roles of listener, speaker, and translator inherent in the act of storytelling. The purpose of storytelling, as illustrated by each of the authors in this project, is not only to articulate alternative histories that have gone unrecorded, but to articulate histories that travel and translate across space and time, raising awareness of how unified narratives of history are constructed, erasing the inherent fluidity and multiplicity of human interactions.

In addressing the forms of resistance available to the authors in my project, I am mindful of how rejection and subversion of colonial language are conceived in postcolonial studies. One pathway for rejecting the colonial language was famously articulated in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind.* For Thiong'o, literature produced by African writers in a European language cannot be considered African literature; instead, he writes, "what we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature."[11] For Thiong'o, there can be no reclamation of a colonial language because its acquisition and use only reconstitute the structural and cultural inequalities of the era of imperialism. Thiong'o's designation of Afro-European literature highlights the negotiation of language which is both reclaimed and oppressive. He refers to Afro-European literature as "a

[11] Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 22.

tradition in transition" because it is in the process of decolonizing without ever reaching that state – decolonization, for Thiong'o, requires an eschewing of all European languages.

In contrast, Chinua Achebe advocates for subversion of colonial languages, describing a new English capable of carrying the weight of his experience, a dialect of English "still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings."[12] The result is a text that is "still arriving" as it is both simultaneously in the ancestral home and in the present. Like Thiong'o, Achebe imagines a hybrid tradition created out of this new English, but the transitional aspect of this linguistic hybridity is crucial to its form: this new English is in the process of adapting and of reconciling the past and the present. Achebe considers English from the multilingual African writer's perspective, that is, as a second language or a language of translation, and the linguistic subversion comes from eschewing the native speaker standard and adapting the language "to many different kinds of use."[13] This may include – as in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the novels analyzed in this project – experimentation in terms of syntax, transliteration, and grammatical patterns, integration of untranslated words, and a structural attentiveness to refrains, proverbs, and repetition that characterize and celebrate an oral tradition.

The oral tradition is so much a part of Achebe's work, and it is as significant to the postcolonial authors read in this project. I take Walkowitz's theory of born translated novels as a point of entry into the study of comparative seas while paying particular attention to the unfixed rapport between speakers and listeners. Storytelling is represented

[12] Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," cited in Thiong'o, 21.
[13] Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," 6.

in writing – through novels, not performances – but much of the language play and experimentation occurs within the context of oral tradition and spoken interaction. It is through orality and interaction that the Mediterranean and the Caribbean are established as multilingual spaces that present new possibilities for conceptualizing language, translation and subversion of linguistic imperialism in literature. Multilingualism in the context of my work refers not only to languages as discrete systems of communication, but to the circulation, negotiation and integration of those systems and points of contact between them. Walkowitz imagines a world in which literary histories are organized according to the languages and versions in which works are read, expanding fields and frames into overlapping paths of circulation and reception. My purpose is to analyze these overlapping paths over time – across generations and within the lifespan of a community member who is coming-of-age – and as a crucial aspect of exile as a spatial, psychological, and linguistic condition. In doing so, I emphasize that exile is best conceptualized in terms of the sea: its cyclical, repetitive processes, its continued redefinition and dissolution of borders, and the extent to which it mirrors the perpetual exchange between human beings and linguistic resources.

In order to define a maritime practice of reading, I first want to establish the theoretical foundations upon which my work builds, starting with the de-centering of the nation state. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever's introduction to *The Literary Channel* presents the stakes of boundary crossing and the border space, both conceptual and geopolitical, as integral to the lineage of the modern novel.[14] In contrasting the paradigms of the nation-neutral Chunnel (a portmanteau of the Channel Tunnel linking Folkestone, Kent with Coquelles, Pas-de-Callais) and transnationalism in the afterword, Emily Apter

[14] Cohen and Dever, *The Literary Channel,* 15.

emphasizes the "state of postnational borderlessness" that defines the narrative Chunnel. This imaginary, which occupies the link between Anglophone and Francophone literary histories, is posited as the future condition of our world, predicated on the academic criticism directed at the nation and the destabilization of the homogenous European nation-state via an influx of large immigrant communities.[15] Apter situates postcolonial comparisons within a transnational paradigm, offering as an example Anglophone and Francophone literatures of West Africa and the Caribbean, while simultaneously acknowledging how colonialism and postcolonial theory have shaped contemporary European studies.[16] Beyond shaping the discipline, Apter's work also gestures to space-making and border crossing as alternatives to colonialist spatializing processes.

Building on the circumvention of the nation-state and the formation of transnational links across bodies of water, scholars such as Margaret Cohen have also explored maritime perspectives of literary analysis. Cohen's "Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe" describes the revisionary accounts of literature which come from a maritime focus, shifting away from landlocked terrestrial scales to oceans, continents, islands, archipelagos, coasts, and the ships which facilitate mobility in and through those spaces.[17] This reframing of literature is further explored in Michael Allan and Elisabetta Benigni's "Lingua Franca: Towards a Philology of the Sea," which introduces "the intercultural dynamics of textual encounters" into discussions of literature and language. Central to this discussion is the question of transformation through mobility.[18] The

[15] Emily Apter, "Afterword," *The Literary Channel*, 251-252.
[16] Apter, "Afterword," 251. See also Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998) and Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).
[17] Margaret Cohen, "Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe," *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 657-662.
[18] Michael Allan and Elisabetta Benigni, "Lingua Franca: Towards a Philology of the Sea," *Philological Encounters* 2 (2017): 1-5.

politics of maritime mobility are analyzed and critiqued in the work of Patricia Yaeger, who dismantles the romanticized myth of *mare liberum* in an editor's column for *PMLA*. The term *mare liberum* dates to Roman law but was popularized in philosopher Hugo Grotius' book of the same name, published in 1609. Grotius put forth the principle that the sea was international territory in direct opposition to the Portuguese *Mare clausum* policy and monopoly of the maritime pathways of the East-India trading company. In revealing the discontinuity between an idealized "commons, a collectively owned space" and the trade conglomerates which dictate policies of maritime management, Yaeger speaks to a long history of juxtaposition between the illusions of *mare liberum* and the reality of capitalism's profit making and exploitation.[19]

Yaeger's argument contributes to an ongoing dialogue between postcolonial and ecocritical schools, particularly as ecocritics become more transnational in their scope. Over the past twenty years, scholars have come to identify two waves of ecocriticism. The first was characterized by nostalgia for and a desire to return to the myth of an unspoiled wilderness as rhapsodized by the Romantic poets.[20] The second-wave of ecocriticism focused on twenty-first century environmental issues with a growing attention to environmentalism as an intersectional and global issue.[21] As with all retrospective efforts to periodize critical movements, the term *wave* encompasses these approaches as both distinct and often overlapping in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt's editorial introduction to *Postcolonial Green*

[19] Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column: Sea Trash, Dark Pools, and the Tragedy of the Commons," *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 525.

[20] This constructed, decontextualized notion of wilderness was particularly problematic in the U.S. context, as first- wave American ecocritics espoused a myth that erased the cultural processes – forced relocation of indigenous peoples, the arbitrary delineation of state and national parks – which created pockets of "uninhabited nature." See Ursula K. Heise's "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism" for an in-depth analysis of second-wave ecocriticism and global engagement.

[21] See Lawrence Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005).

(2010) describes an emerging focus on environmental justice ecocriticism which considers, for example, the way that industrial waste crosses national borders and the particular challenges that disenfranchised and impoverished populations face as a result of racist and classist environmental policies.[22] In the context of postcolonial studies, environmental justice is inextricable from social and economic justice.[23] The methodology of contributions such as Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renee K. Gosson, and George B. Handley's *Caribbean Literature and Environment* as well as Serenella Iovino's authored and edited volumes on ecocriticism in Italy are geographically specific, "implicitly demand[ing] that we guard against generalization in our understanding of 'postcolonialism' or 'environmentalism'."[24] This project is similarly dedicated to the reality of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean as radically different contexts geographically, historically and culturally. However, there are comparative resonances, if not points of similarity, to be explored through a critical reading of the sea.

In my project, I contend that a maritime practice of reading encourages lateral (margin to margin) as well as vertical (margin to center) studies, and it is also a productive frame through which to analyze exile in the novels of seven contemporary women writers: Marie-Célie Agnant, Gabriella Ghermandi, Gisèle Pineau, Erminia Dell'Oro, Assia Djebar, Aḥlām Mustaghānamī and Huda Barakāt. The scope of this

[22] On May 23, 2019 it was reported in *The Guardian* that Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte stated that if Canada does not take back their exported waste, it will be "[left] within its territorial waters." Protests in both the Philippines and Malaysia regarding exported waste continue to raise awareness of problematic and exploitative policies that treat waste management as a national issue.

[23] See Deane Curtin's *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (2005), Robert P. Marzec's *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature: From Daniel Defoe to Salmon Rushie* (2007), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffen's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), Anthony Carrigan's *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment* (2010) and Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011) for further engagement.

[24] Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, eds., "Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice," *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, 6.

project focuses on one novel from each of these authors: Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007), Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* (1996), Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* (1991), Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), Mustaghānamī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1993), and Barakāt's *Ḥārith al-miyāh* (1998). Each work has been chosen for the way in which it challenges the perceived constraints of the novel as a genre "anchored squarely within national culture," through the inclusion of poetic and folkloric elements, a multiplicity of voices, and the structure of a frame narrative which suggests the pre-novelistic transnational paths of *1001 Nights* or *The Odyssey.*[25] I argue that these practices reconfigure the space of the novel to allow for multimodal accounts of communities and histories that are transnational, translinguistic and renewable. The seven authors are contemporaries, their respective works published within thirty years of each other, and while the Caribbean and the Mediterranean may not intersect spatially or historically, these texts are both stylistically and thematically linked to the sea which invites a comparative approach.

My project puts into conversation Algeria, Lebanon, Italy, the Horn of Africa, and the Francophone Caribbean while exploring the expansive possibilities of reading the postcolonial novel through the sea. The circulation of waters, bodies, and languages is central to the storytelling practices of these texts, creating a space for an interactive and communal remembering of the past. The co-construction of histories is presented in contrast to History, underscoring the fact that official records and national archives are narratives curated and disseminated by those in power. In these novels the transgenerational impact of colonial and wartime violence on human beings is realized through storytelling, manifesting through a spatial, psychological and linguistic sense of

[25] Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, *The Literary Channel: The International Invention of the Novel*, 25.

exile as characters move across borders, experience delusions, hallucinations, and incoherent recollections of trauma, and negotiate their identities in relation to their mother and "stepmother" tongues. In the chapters that follow, I address these facets of exile and contend that reading the sea itself as a creative frame most closely reflects the various mobilities at play in each novel.

Caribbean Studies: Diffracted Sea and *Histoire naufragée*

In bringing Caribbean and Mediterranean studies together, I would like to establish resonances between these two disciplines, each of which figures the sea as a space of transitoriness, crossing and displacement. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* suggests that cultural historians "take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective."[26] This figuration of the Atlantic can be drawn into comparison with Antonio Benitez-Rojo's conceptualization of the Caribbean as "an important historico-economic sea and, further, a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly."[27] It would be a mistake, however, to consider either the Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea as fixed geographical sites. This project is invested in maritime spaces for their inherent instability, which reflects the (re)constitution and intersection of tensions and histories in the postcolonial Caribbean and Mediterranean.

The co-construction of the past and a communal remembering in the present is integral to Caribbean Critique, a term coined by Nick Nisbett to encompass the poetics of

[26] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15.
[27] Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 9.

Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, the histories of plantation records, trade routes and the Haitian Revolution, and the literature of Gisèle Pineau and Marie-Célie Agnant.[28] Césaire is broadly considered among the forebearers of Caribbean Critique, and his work is significant to this project for the way in which it articulates the experience of exile for the African diaspora and models an attempt to restore, or reconcile, the inaccessible past to the present through a cultivation of solidarity and shared experience. The authors of the influential 1989 manifesto, *Éloge de la créolité*, declared themselves Césaire's sons, writing that through Négritude he "restitua l'Afrique mère, l'Afrique matrice, la civilisation nègre" (restored Mother Africa, Matrix Africa, Negro Civilization).[29] Césaire is cited as among the first to restore the continent of Africa to some iteration of its pre-colonial self, inspiring co-construction and communal remembering to offset the amputation that separates the "we" of *Éloge de la Créolité* from their native land.

This focus on restoring the pre-colonial can be read as ecological, social and economic in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism. Jana Evans Braziel's book chapter "Caribbean Genesis" reads Éduoard Glissant's comparison of two contemporary ecologies in *Poétique de la relation* as a "poetics of (eco-)relation."[30] Glissant reflects on the rhetoric of land possession in the Caribbean in rejecting an absolute and static root identity in favor of a rhizomatic identity that circulates, shaped through relation with others. Root identity in the Caribbean is explicitly aligned with the extermination of indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago, which situates genocide as the first ecocide that irrevocably fragmented Antillean soil, as no living inhabitant can claim a direct

[28] Nick Nesbitt, "Introduction," *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Theory from Toussaint to Glissant*, xi.
[29] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Mohamed Bouya Taleb-Khyar. *Éloge de la créolité*, 17.
[30] Jana Evans Braziel, "Caribbean Genesis: Language, Gardens, Worlds (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Éduoard Glissant)," *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, 117.

filiation with the land. Braziel notes that for Glissant "the entangled histories of genocide and ecocide destroy the possibility for genealogical and arboreal continuity of roots and absolute rootedness" in the Caribbean, thus requiring an identity of relation.[31] It is for this reason that the sea functions as a useful site from which to read.

The sinking language ("naufragée", "ancrage", "plongée dans un fond") used throughout *Éloge* presents the physical sea as inextricable from the metaphorical and/or theoretical function of maritime spaces as sites of loss and salvaging. If "naufragée" does not always imply death by drowning or flooding, it is always a situation of displacement. Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant write that restoration of "la mémoire vraie," or true memory of the Caribbean, is barred by dislocation: "notre Histoire (ou plus exactement nos histoires) est naufragée dans l'Histoire coloniale" (our History (or more precisely our histories) is shipwrecked in colonial history).[32] The visual contrast between Histoire and (histoires) brackets and deemphasizes the plurality of histories produced by colonized subjects; those voices are rendered parenthetically irrelevant to the colonizer's master narrative of History. *Éloge de la créolité* draws on both the metaphor and the literal significance of the sea through use of the word "naufragée," or shipwrecked. A shipwreck may be beached ("sur une plage") or sunk ("dans la mer") and, in this context, the authors' use of the preposition *dans* emphasizes the burial of Antillean histories within and beneath History. Here both the physical and the figurative maritime space of the sea contribute to an understanding of the shipwreck. The term "naufragée" evokes the

[31] Braziel, "Caribbean Genesis," 117.

[32] Translation is mine. See Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité*, 36. See also Iris M. Zavala's concluding remarks on the pronoun of solidarity ("nous" in French, represented here through the possessive adjective "notre/nos"): "There is the *we* uttered to marginalize, alienate, repress a 'you' (*them, they*), but there is also the *we* of the culturally, socially and ethnically oppressed […] who refuse to be centralized and speak from the periphery asserting their difference," "Concluding Remarks," *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s: Selected Papers*, 131.

trafficking of human bodies across water in slave ships, and those who did not survive the passage.

A ship at sea occupies a space between landmasses and nations, belonging to none until it reaches port. Semantically, the term 'at sea' encompasses both seas and oceans, raising an important question about distinguishing these bodies of water. In the field of oceanography, the definition of the sea is contested. Seas may be partially enclosed by land, but the geography varies from the islands of the Caribbean to the continental coasts of the Mediterranean. Seas may be defined as places where land and ocean meet or, as in the case of the Sargasso Sea, defined by ocean currents. The boundaries between seas and other bodies of water are arbitrarily defined, constructed through the cartographic naming of approximate spaces without any means of maintaining the distinctions between those spaces.[33] There is a sense of *in betweenness* that constitutes a sea, in each of these definitions, creating the notion of the sea as a liminal space that is fluid and changing.

In *Poétique de la relation*, Éduoard Glissant objects to the classification of the Caribbean as a Mediterranean of the Americas, drawing attention to the etymology of the latter: the definition of 'mediterranean' is between lands. Any number of seas could be reframed as *mediterranean* by this line of thinking (for example, the Red Sea), but Glissant emphasizes that the Caribbean is not one of them. He contrasts these two bodies of water, describing the Caribbean as a sea that diffracts – characterized by its creolization, openness and instability – and the Mediterranean as a concentrated sea, one that unifies. In part he is addressing the geographical difference between the Caribbean, which surrounds an archipelago, and the Mediterranean whose border is continental and

[33] *The Glossary of Mapping Sciences*.

national. Scholars of the Mediterranean would (and do) object to this image of sameness, citing as historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell do the microecologies of the region which "can be differentiated in the intensity of their fragmentation […] every slope or terrace of a valley-side, each hollow, dune and pool of a coastal lowland, may have its own identity."[34] In light of these opposing approaches to the Mediterranean, it is productive to consider the way in which these two seas diffract and destabilize boundaries in different ways. This is where my project intervenes – not to approach these regions or fields reductively, but to read iterations of circulation and fragmentation through comparative seas.

Nets and Networks of the Mediterranean Sea

As much as the Caribbean is a site for salvaging and refracting marginalized histories, so too is the Mediterranean. French historian Fernand Braudel describes the Mediterranean as "mille choses à la fois. Non pas une mer, mais une succession de mers. Non pas une civilisation, mais des civilisations entassées les unes sur les autres."[35] Braudel's image of the Mediterranean as a composite of civilizations layered on top of one another echoes Predrag Matvejevic's description of the Mediterranean as both an archive and a grave.[36] This image of an inaccessible history that is nonetheless preserved can be read across maritime studies, and in the specific context of the Mediterranean inaccessibility can be read against repeated attempts to claim ownership over the sea. By "une succession de mers" Braudel refers to the various names by which the Mediterranean has been

[34] Peregrine Horden & Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, 78.
[35] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée: L'espace et l'histoire*, 8.
[36] Predrag Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, 23.

known.[37] It is not only defined as a sea "between lands" but it has also been the source of competing claims of ownership throughout history, beginning with the Roman Empire's designation of the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum* in 30 AD.[38]

Following the end of the Italian colonial period and World War II, rhetoric invoking the myth of *mare nostrum* fell out of use, only to reemerge during the so-called "migrant crisis" in 2013 as the name of Italy's military and humanitarian operation which was later discontinued. The title of Franco Cassano's essay, *Il pensiero meridiano*, suggests that any discussion of the Mediterranean is inextricable from the Southern question, (re)definitions of the Global Souths and (for Cassano and Iovino, among others) Southern Italy's place within that emerging construct.[39] To understand evolving conceptualizations of the Global South, it is necessary to begin with the traditional, monolithic imagining of the world as divided into the binary opposition of North-West and South-East. Samuel Huntington's 1993 article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" characterizes the post-Cold War era as one in which fault lines between civilizations are the source of current (and future) threats to the West whereby southern Italy and Greece

[37] "Challenging the usual palette of ecological imagination, the ancient Egyptians probably called it the 'Great Green.' For the Romans, it was 'Mare nostrum' and for the Greeks 'the sea over by us' (*he hemetera Thalassa* – Hecataeus F302c, with the variant *he kath'hemas Thalassa,* 'the sea in our part of the world,' Hecataeus F18b). The Jews name it *Yam Gadol*, the 'Great Sea,' and the Turks (as Serpii Oppermann recalls in her article), *Akdeniz*, the White Sea – a more luminous and animated counterpoint to the Black Sea. Germans – who literally built a cult of its waters and shores – call it *Mittelmeer*, the 'Middle Sea.'" See Serenella Iovino, "Introduction: Mediterranean Ecocriticism, or, A Blueprint for Cultural Amphibians." *Ecozono* 4 no. 2 (2013): 1-2.

[38] Olga Tellegen-Couperus, *A Short History of Roman Law*, 32.

[39] "Southern thought explicitly claims for itself the connection between the South, the Italian one, and the Souths of the worlds. This is not done to establish equivocal identifications and assimilations, but to oppose the tendency to think that the emancipation of the Italian South can be read as a separate question, enclosed within the boundaries of a national or continental state, and blind to its connections with the outside." See Franco Cassano, Trans. Norma Bouchard and Valerie Ferme, "Prologue: Parallels and Meridians," *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, xxxvi.

occupy an ambiguous position on the fringe of Europe. One of these fault lines is described alongside Ib Ohlsson's map of the eastern boundary of Western Christianity circa 1500 (Figure 1): the map depicts a line running along the eastern border of Finland, Estonia, and Latvia, through Bela-Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia, and Montenegro, ending at the shore of Adriatic Sea. This line divides the Protestant and Catholic north and west from the Orthodox and Muslim east and south, but in this article Huntington focuses on the 1,300 year old conflict between what he terms Western and Islamic civilizations.[40] Huntington's work has since been widely discredited by Edward Said (among others) for its essentializing, homogenizing and orientalist rhetoric, conceptualizing identities and civilizations as "shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history."[41] This article and its criticism offer insight into late-20th century misrepresentations of the East-West divide and the Mediterranean Sea.

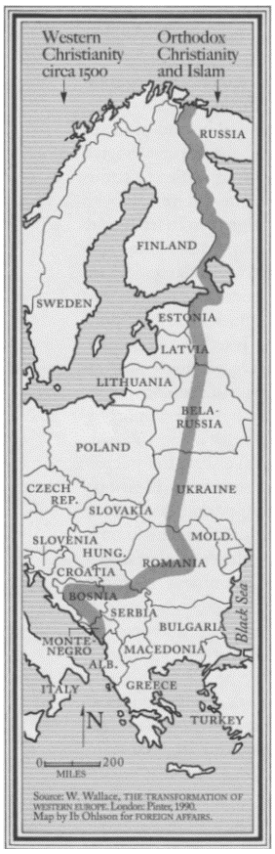

Figure 1. Map of the Eastern Boundary of Western Christianity Circa 1500.[42]

Consulting this same excerpt, Cassano notes in the preface to the English language edition of *Il pensiero meridiano* that Huntington's framing of the Mediterranean as this point of contact and conflict between North-West and South-East is not coincidental: in fact, he writes, "this is the dominant representation of the

[40] Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 no. 3 (1993): 31.
[41] See Edward Said's "The Clash of Ignorance," published in *The Nation* in 2001.
[42] Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", 30, figure 1.

Mediterranean: a frontier of the Western empire that is a seismic and insecure area."[43] Cassano juxtaposes his own approach to Huntington's fault line, advocating for the Mediterranean as a site of cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. And in direct opposition to Glissant's characterization of the Mediterranean, he writes that it has become a root in need of rediscovery: "strong, but constitutionally plural, location of clashes and encounters, of victories and losses, of exchanges and invasions," not a monolith but a multiverse.[44] Thus, a coherent image of the Mediterranean is nonexistent, as the sea is defined by its plurality and its transnational *in betweenness*.

In framing the Mediterranean as a literary space, scholars such as Elisabetta Benigni have traced the emergent metaphor of the sea as "a system of nets of intertwining lines of political imaginaries," while suggesting a practice of reading the circulation, trafficking, and translation of texts and of languages within the region.[45] As a choice of metaphor, the net is a rich image, woven together, emphasizing not a linear link of threads as might describe a chain but a continuous and inclusive integration of disparate parts.[46] The image of the net corresponds with the metaphors glossed by Karla Mallette in her analysis of narrative systems in the pre-modern Mediterranean, from John Wansbrough's circulating orbits of "ships, sailors, commodities, and linguistic matter through the Mediterranean basin" to the study of mercantile networks.[47] Scholars of the contemporary Mediterranean have integrated urban spaces into this conversation, emphasizing "the relational encounters between the Mediterranean, its cities, and their

[43] Cassano, *Southern Thought,* xxix.
[44] Cassano, *Southern Thought*, 137.
[45] Elisabetta Benigni, "Dante and the Construction of a Mediterranean Literary Space: Revisiting a 20th Century Philological Debate in Southern Europe and in the Arab World," *Philological Encounters* 2 (2017): 113.
[46] *Merriam Webster Dictionary.* "Net." Accessed July 1, 2018.
[47] Karla Mallette, "The Seven Sages at Sea: Framed Narrative Systems in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean," *Philological Encounters* 2 (2017): 13.

people."[48] A common thread across the field is a focus on relationships and interaction, which determine the Mediterranean's shifting politics, economics, and demographics.

My research is informed by, and acknowledges, the city-sea relationship in the context of the postcolonial novel. However, it strives to avoid a myopic comparative analysis of urban spaces by considering the city-sea as one of many facets of the Mediterranean. This project also diverges from readings that consider the Mediterranean as a spatial model, conflating the sea with "instances of hybridity that it registers" or, in the case of the trans-Mediterranean construct, dissolving the sea into "a mimetic topos."[49] My project recognizes instances of hybridity, but it argues that these instances occur within itinerant, liminal spaces modeled on the sea. This is more than – as Yasser and Talbayev might describe it - a thematization of the sea, or the relegation of the sea to a literary backdrop, as characters internalize and reproduce through interaction those aspects of the sea that make it a subversive and inclusive space: dissolution and crossing of orders, circulation and (re)combination, and an unstable temporality and spatiality. Beyond temporal or spatial considerations, I employ the sea as a frame for close reading novels of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, exploring the maritime refractions of history, identity and language within the interactive context of communal storytelling.

The Path of the Frame Narrative

Alongside a maritime lens, this project employs postcolonial theories of narrative, building on previous scholarship of narratology and the novel. Much of this scholarship has focused on the historical rise of the realist novel in Europe during the eighteenth and

[48] Yasser Elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, "Critically Mediterranean: An Introduction," 6.
[49] Elhariry and Talbayev, "Critically Mediterranean," 7.

nineteenth centuries, and the characterization of the novel in Antillean, African and Arabic contexts as derivative of the European model.[50] In concentrating on women writers who employ a frame narrative for the purpose of dislocating and decentering the genre, I examine the way in which this structural fluidity allows the storyteller and reader to move between spatial and temporal borders (between continents, bodies of water, the past and the present), a practice which evokes the shifting currents of the sea and is integral to the storytellers' reconstruction of the past. Reconstruction relies on collective memory as a form of counter-memory which infiltrates and destabilizes History by incorporating the voices of those erased or marginalized by the national narrative. I demonstrate through my own close (maritime) readings of these novels a simultaneous recovery and creation of histories and communities that serves as a departure from the nineteenth-century European model and presents a new approach to analyzing the intersections of time, space and totality.

In this project, I borrow a notion of totality from Georg Lukács, who employs the term to distinguish between the genres of the epic and the novel in his *Theory of the Novel* (1920), one of the earliest texts to attempt defining the form.[51] An essential characteristic of the epic for Lukács is its view of the world as integrative and complete, and the hero's destiny as connected "by indissoluble threads to the community whose fate is crystallized in his own."[52] In contrast, the novel's inner form is defined by the dissonance experienced by the individual towards reality and it "has been understood as

[50] There is a cause-effect assigned to the rise of the novel outside of Europe, whereby the European novel is imported in the nineteenth century, translated into local languages, and later imitated.

[51] "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality." See Lukács, *Theory of the Novel,* 186.

[52] Lukács *Theory of the Novel* 193.

the process of the problematic individual's journeying toward himself […] toward clear self-recognition," privileging the individual over the community.[53] The totality of the novel is in the scope of its biographical form, which limits infinite possibilities by relating them back to an individual's life.[54] In using the term *Bildungsroman* to characterize the novels of postcolonial authors Gabriella Ghermandi, Gisèle Pineau and Erminia Dell'Oro, I hope to demonstrate that a maritime reading of this genre renders it more expansive. This reading imagines a non-linear, multivocal coming-of-age whereby the individual's process of "journeying toward himself" is likened to the movement of the tide or the current of the sea. The journey is defined by the unfixed potential and the instability of identity formed through and by interaction with others.

In performing a reading of the *Bildungsroman* that is both non-linear and refracted, I would like to address how this reading diverges from previous analyses of both the realist and the postcolonial novel. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) explores the dissonance between individual and reality, building upon Lukács' work. Watt writes that the novel requires a secular and individual world view (again in contrast to "the classical world's view of reality as subsisting in timeless universals") and is characterized by its cohesive plot, featuring a linear progress from past (cause) to present (effect) and a commitment to verisimilitude.[55] This progressive view of time in the realist novel corresponds to the rise of industrial capitalism – made possible, Watt writes, by enterprising voyagers who supplied the trade expansion with gold, slaves, and foreign products in the sixteenth century and colonies and world markets in the seventeenth

[53] Lukács *Theory of the Novel*, 199.
[54] Lukács *Theory of the Novel*, 200.
[55] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*: *Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, 22-23.

century.[56] Economic development and increased mobility of the (white middle-class European male) individual comes at the expense of those marginalized communities subjected to imperial and colonial domination.[57] This mobility, represented in the realist novel, also reinforces patriarchal and nationalist hierarchies, situating women within the domestic space while providing enterprising bourgeois men with freedom *to a point* provided the novel ends with their assimilation into society.

In the postcolonial novel, the dissonance between the hero and reality is, in effect, a struggle against a reality that has been constructed and reinforced by colonial and imperialist narratives of history. The postcolonial novel incorporates characteristics Lukács associates with the epic, namely in its treatment of community. And the postcolonial writer is, like Daniel Maximin, motivated by the desire "de trouver le 'nous', de retrouver des paroles antérieures qui ont déjà été dites, et pas seulement par des écrivains. J'essaie de rechercher ce que les peuples ont pu exprimer dans l'oralité" (to find the 'us,' to find earlier words that have already been said, and not just by writers. I'm trying to find out what people have been able to express orally).[58] Maximin's words necessarily evoke Glissant's "roman du Nous" introduced in *Le discours antillais*: "L'histoire et la littérature, désencombrées de leurs majuscules et contées dans nos gestes, se rencontrent à nouveau pour proposer…le roman de l'implication du Je au Nous, du Je à l'Autre, du Nous au Nous." (History and literature, uncluttered from their capital letters and told in our gestures, meet again to propose… the novel of the

[56] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 67.

[57] Citing Charles Morazé's coining of the term, Edward Said notes that the realist novel – with its regulated plot and contextualization within bourgeois society - is fundamentally tied to *les bourgeois conquérants* and cannot be theorized separately from imperialism. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, in Dorothy J. Hale's *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, 692.

[58] Christine Chaulet-Achour, "Entretien avec Daniel Maximin." *La trilogie caribéenne de Daniel Maximin*, 59. Translation is mine.

implication of the I in the We, the I in the Other, the We in the Us.)[59] That is to say, the postcolonial novel – and by extension the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* – places the emphasis on the individual's journey as defined through relationships within and outside of communities.

In *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, Celia Britton writes that the history of trade, slavery and forced migration in the Caribbean created a sense of urgency whereby the linguistic, racial and cultural hybridity of the region both necessitates and problematizes community.[60] She describes how this complex relationship with community is reflected in the political and literary movements of the Francophone Caribbean, from Aimé Césaire's Négritude to Édouard Glissant's *antillanité* and Bernabé, Chamoiseau et Confiant's *Éloge de la créolité*, emphasizing that these movements are concerned not only with salvaging the past but with the collaborative creation of a different reality in the present. This worldbuilding is reflected in the structure of the postcolonial novel, which does not allow itself to be restricted by preexisting structures of linearity or reality defined by History or literary convention that have historically misrepresented or repressed marginalized voices.

I argue that each novel represented in this project shares a sense of urgency that stems from a lack of permanence. This lack of permanence can be read as a traumatic response to a history of forced migration, as well as other forms of exile that threaten the characters' relationships to their communities and to a collective past. In my reading of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean seas, I analyze not only the stories that are salvaged, but the act of salvaging itself. By salvaging, I am referring to the way that

[59] *Le discours*, 267. Translation is mine.
[60] Celia Britton, *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, 2.

storytellers – in each of these novels – receive and reproduce communal histories. In this project, it is the frame narrative that reveals the storyteller's process. The seven novels analyzed in the following chapters utilize frame narratives which draw the reader's attention to the constructedness of reality, in particular the manner in which one historical account or perspective become History, accepted as an objective fact. The frame narratives serve a secondary function through their inextricable relationship to translation as a thematic and structural device, engaged in the practice of unsettling "native readers," occupying multiple spaces and temporalities, and unforgetting minority languages and voices which have shaped what we conceptualize as Francophone, Italian and Arabic literatures.

The frame narrative has its origins in oral history, informing the way storytelling is understood in this project. As a literary mechanism, its presence within the novel serves to emphasize oral transmission as integral to the circulation and preservation of stories. The seven novels I examine include – at minimum - two levels of narrative embeddedness in their iteration of the frame narrative. The first level is one to which all narratives belong because narrative exists at the center of the presenter (historical author, implied author, narrator) and recipient (historical reader, implied reader, narratee) relationship.[61] The second level draws the narrator-narratee construction out of metaphor through the frame narrative, and is concerned with the poetics of reception and speech communities within the novel. I argue that the frame narratives in the novels of my seven

[61] William Nelles, *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative*, 9. In the field of narratology, scholars Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal have explored the roles of the focalisé ("focalized"), focalisateur ("focalizer"), and the focalisataire ("spectator") which further complicates these roles. See Gérard Genette. *The Architext: An Introduction.* Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992 and Mieke Bal. *Narratologie : Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes.* 1977. Utrecht : HES, 1984.

authors serve to authenticate the voices represented in the text, instilling a confidence in the reader that he or she can trust the compiler of stories (the "hero" of the frame narrative) to have accurately and fully represented the lived experiences of others.

This authenticity is complex and rich in the postcolonial novel, where the framing, circulating and translating of languages is central to each story. The use of a frame narrative further authenticates the translation and interpretation of languages which has taken place between the recipient (compiler) and the storyteller. Elaborating on the significance of authenticity in her *Introduction to Narratology*, Monika Fludernik writes that the frame narrative is a strategy of (1) shifting responsibility away from the author for views expressed by and through the storyteller and (2) authentication, particularly when provided by an editor or commentator (real or fictional).[62] Fludernik's authentication is explicitly connected to a construct of reality outside of the text, whereby an authoritative voice (editor, commentator) situates the stories in relation to a recognizable or plausible (i.e. dominant) world view. But within a novel that is in the process of constructing a new reality – such as those analyzed in this project – authenticity is mutually reinforced through the relationship between the narrative layers.

Constructing Reality in Women's Writing

In a 2014 article, Christiane Chaulet Achour poses the question: "Que faire de la sultane des *Nuits* pour une écrivaine au Maghreb aujourd'hui?" She cites several contemporary women writers in the Maghreb whose titled works reference the figure of Shahrazad, the celebrated female storyteller who is constructed as a model, ancestor and ambassador of the genre of *le conte* (story or tale, specifically in the embedded context of *1001*

[62] Monika Fludernik, *Introduction to Narratology*, 58.

Nights).[63] In flowing into or breaking the mold that Shahrazad represents as a storyteller, Achour proposes that this figure acts as "une lumière dans la nuit dont elles [les écrivaines] explorent les potentialités" for their own self-expression.[64] In engaging with Shahrazad as a model of *expression féminine*, these writers (including Assia Djebar and Huda Barakāt) explore themes of migration and circulation, sororal bonds, and gendered private and public spaces in both fictional and autobiographical texts.

It is the oral transmission of the *conteuse* that embodies *expression féminine*, as contextualized within a feminist poetics of narrative voice. In charting a maritime practice of reading through the novels of seven women writers, I draw from theories of women's writing and *écriture féminine*. Nancy K. Miller's *Subject to Change* describes *écriture féminine* as "a process or practice by which the female *body*, with its peculiar drives and rhythms, inscribes itself as text."[65] Coined by Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay, "Le Rire de la Méduse," and further explored in Luce Irigaray's *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, *écriture féminine* challenges the logic and verisimilitude of traditional (male) texts by advocating for transformation, circulation, and repetition of language that does not conform to the logic of patriarchal narrative systems.[66] In the 1980s and early 1990s, feminist scholars explored what it meant to transform the novel from within, to subvert, critique, or reimagine the cultural givens and set of principles that determine

[63] Shahrazad is sometimes read as a feminist character. Feminist readings see her as an intelligent heroine whose sororal loyalty motivates her to challenge patriarchal violence. Others see her as a figure who has been reduced to her role of "storyteller" and whose complexity as a fully realized person is erased in favor of her function. See Christina Chaulet Achour, "Que faire de la sultane des 'Nuits' pour une écrivaine au Maghreb aujourd'hui?" *Dalhousie French Studies* 103 (2014) : 45-53.

[64] Achour, "Que faire de la sultane," 45.

[65] Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change*, 27.

[66] For example, the proposed distinction "entre *histoire* (l'ensemble d'événements racontés), *récit* (le discours, oral ou écrit, qui les raconte) et *narration* (l'acte réel ou fictive qui produit ce discours, c'est-à-dire le fait même de raconter)" in Gérard Genette's 1983 *Nouveau discours du récit.* In the traditional realist novel, these three components of narrative create the illusion of verisimilitude through a logical, chronological sequence of events recounted by an omniscient narrator who exists outside of the story.

verisimilitude in accordance with a world view.[67] Miller, for example, proposes in her book that the signature of the feminist writer "is the mark of a resistance to dominant ideologies […] the site of a possible political disruption."[68] This resistance to dominant ideology can be exemplified, as it is in my selected texts, by dynamic and collaborative constructions of reality.

In my work, the multiple, mutually authorizing voices circulating between frame and embedded narratives resonates with the routes of pre-novelistic stories and the authentication-preservation of those stories (and their variations) by listener-recipients. This circulation also enables a dynamic negotiation between the author, the reader, and the text. Susan Lanser's *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* elaborates on this negotiation when she defines women's writing as determined by "complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text."[69] In addition to proposing an evolving reader response, Lanser distinguishes between three narrative modes – authorial, personal and communal voice - which offer women different forms of authority and platforms from which to speak.[70] The authorial voice is public and omniscient, existing outside of the narrative, and the personal voice is the 'I' who tells the story, both of which presuppose that the 'I' is an individual.[71] Communal voice refers to "a practice in which narrative authority is inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community."[72]

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[67] Susan Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Poetics of Narrative Voice," *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, 17.
[68] Miller, *Subject to Change*, 17.
[69] Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 5.
[70] Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 15.
[71] Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 16.
[72] Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 21.

It is this understanding of communal voice that is present in the mutually authorizing voices of my selected texts.

This project also benefits from feminist autobiography theory which emerges out of the 1980s, beginning with Estelle Jelenik's *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*.[73] Feminist scholars of this period identified patterns of fragmentation and threading of others into the "I" in women's autobiographies.[74] Destabilizing the "truth pact" of autobiography – that is, the correlation of authority to truth – these scholars turn their focus to "issues of identity, now seen less as something to be disinterred or captured and more as something to made, cultural and gender hybridity, embodiment, and the transgression of generic and other boundaries."[75] This scholarship presents self-identity and the unified self in women's autobiographies as a pushback against the postmodern disruption of self, citing the historical marginalization of these lives, but in doing so it suggests that women's lives can only be fully represented through an individualist narrative. Postcolonial theorists have rightfully critiqued, as Françoise Lionnet does in her contribution to *Postcolonialisme & Autobiographie*, "les approches critiques occidentales qui n'ont vu le postmodernisme qu'à travers les œillères de la modernité européenne" and in doing so, characterize "l'expérience du discontinu et du fragmentaire comme étant la signature même du monde dit postmoderne puisque ce serait plutôt l'ère coloniale qui inaugure cette expérience." (Western critical approaches which saw

[73] Jelenik's work was followed by Leonore Hoffmann and Margo Culley's edited volume, *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy* (1985) and Domna Stanton's *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (1984; 1987).

[74] "Sensitive to the dangers of this position, since it resembles the stereotypical definition of women as finding their fulfillment in service to others, [Domna] Stanton emphasizes the importance of seeing the interconnectedness of women's selves in non-hierarchal terms." See Marjanne Goozé, "The Definitions of Self and Form in Feminist Autobiography Theory," *Women's Studies* 21.4 (1992): 406.

[75] Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, 281.

postmodernism only through the blinders of European modernity and in doing so, characterize the experience of the discontinuous and the fragmentary as being the very signature of the so-called postmodern world seeing as it was rather the colonial era that inaugurated this experience.)[76] In grappling with the traumatic fragmentation of identity stemming from colonial violence, postcolonial women writers emphasize not only the reclamation of Self but reclamation through collective memory and community.

Lionnet's *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* anticipates her later work, informed by feminist theory and Glissant's *Poétique de la relation*, through her analysis of postcolonial women's writing. In this text, Lionnet constructs and defines *métissage* as a praxis which crosses disciplines, referring to both body and form. Self-writing for women as colonized subjects is characterized by the "socioideological horizons [marked] by the concrete layerings or stratifications of diverse language systems" which interact in the textual space of the autobiography or semi-autobiographical novel.[77] For Lionnet, *métissage* represents a feminist practice of reading which resists the territorializing of texts and "emancipate[s] the writer from any internal or external coercion to use any one literary style or form".[78] My own project engages with this practice while highlighting the sea as a conceptual space which defies territorialization and the generic conventions of the traditional novel, and furthermore unsettles "stratifications of [language]" through speakers' circulating and integrating communication systems.

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[76] Françoise Lionnet, "Questions de méthode : Itinéraires ourles de l'autoportrait et de la critique," *Postcolonialisme & Autobiographie*, 13. Translation is mine.

[77] Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, 21.

[78] Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, 216.

The Maritime Shift

With the exception of Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* and Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia*, the texts in this dissertation are not explicitly autobiographical but each is concerned with disrupting configurations of fiction and reality along three intersecting axes: history, identity, and language. These axes constitute the conceptual organization of my project and serve to anchor my close readings. In the following chapters, I examine how history, identity, and language are defined and disrupted in each novel; how storytelling empowers both speaker and listener to subvert and pluralize these facets of the human experience; and how a maritime shift reframes these texts in relation to one another. By maritime shift, I am referring to the new perspectives in literary and cultural studies that center the sea as a conceptual space, as an alternative to fixed categories of time and place, and as a metaphor for the opacity of memory, the politics of mobility, and the circulation of languages and bodies within and between border spaces. The sea is decentralized, making it an apt metaphor for subverting the hierarchy of conventional literary studies.

My project draws from these conversations and contributes to the maritime shift by arguing that the sea permeates these texts in the dynamics of interaction, the development of characters in relation to others, and the processes of storytelling which continuously redefine histories, identities, and languages. In my first chapter, for example, I take up the sea as a formal, stylistic and thematic resonance which refracts colonial histories in Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* and Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle*. This refraction is represented through the polyphony of voices brought together across generations, the shifting role of the storyteller and the recipient,

and the central preoccupation of both texts with the sea. In *Le Livre d'Emma* and *Regina di fiori e di perle*, the sea carries French and Italian colonial forces to Haiti and Ethiopia in the recounted past and it is integral to the border crossing of the storytellers, Emma and Mahlet, who encounter and contest French and Italian narratives of the colonial period while studying abroad. History is often pared down and codified into a linear progression of events, but these texts disrupt that constructed linearity through the overlapping of past and present, the incorporation of multiple narratives, and the circulation of the sea which is simultaneously constant and inconstant. History is diffracted into histories and the act of storytelling ensures a decentered, multivocal, and unfixed relationship to historical events, which is a crucial form of resistance to canonical cultural memory.

In chapter two of the dissertation, I shift from thinking about histories to exploring the destabilization of identity through Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* and Erminia Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea.* These two novels transform the *Bildungsroman*, no longer an individual's journeying towards self but a coming of age through exile and into community. Pineau and Dell'Oro explore an inheritance of loss through generations of women, and the resultant fragmentation of identity that stems from the traumatic legacy of colonialism, slavery, and cultural *métissage*. In this chapter, I examine the continuous reshaping of identity that comes from the mobility of characters, "met" repeatedly through the curation of stories over time. Each interaction between storyteller and recipient, revealing and recontextualizing characters, reshapes individual and communal identities.

In an interview with Erminia Dell'Oro, Alessandro Luchetti suggested that "le

prime riflessioni sulla propria identità nascono proprio dallo scontro con un'altra realtà, spesso geografica" (the first reflections on one's identity are really born from the clash with another reality, often geographical).[79] In the context of the interview, identity is conceptualized on a national scale, as Dell'Oro came to recognize the extraordinary story she had to tell only after she moved from Eritrea to Italy. In both novels, storytellers Gisèle and Marianna struggle to contextualize themselves between France and Guadeloupe, Eritrea and Italy. At the same time, this contextualization occurs through intimate interactions with others, as characters respond to the way they are interpellated as foreigners or as *meticcie.* In my reading, I want to emphasize the importance of repeated encounters to this notion of identity as an unfixed and fluid theme. The sea comes to represent not only a grappling between exile, alienation and acceptance that ebbs and flows as characters come of age through a variety of interpersonal encounters, but also the non-linearity and irresolution of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*. There is an infinite potential for growth and development in reading the coming of age genre not as a line from A (childhood) to B (adulthood) but as a cyclical process.

My third chapter, "Language as a Maritime Frame: Circulation and Border Crossing in *L'amour, la fantasia*, *Dhākirat al-Jasad* and *Ḥārith al-miyāh*," focuses on linguistic disruption. I examine Assia Djebar's *écriture féminine* and Aḥlām Mustaghānamī's shifting conceptions of authenticity and authorship between French and Arabic in the context of postcolonial Algeria. I also consider the transmission of memory in Huda Barakāt's destabilized Beirut, grappling with the linguistic articulation of wartime trauma in Arabic. This chapter analyzes the formal and stylistic iterations of the

[79] Alessandro Luchetti, "Intervista con Erminia Dell'Oro." *Iperstoria* 6 (2015): 192-208. Translation is mine.

sea in the circulation of language, dialect and register in contexts of interaction, both real and imagined by the characters. I focus on exchanges and mobilities of people and linguistic resources, analyzing how language as a social process can both reinforce and destabilize power structures depending on interactional contexts. This third chapter also explicitly demonstrates the way that history, identity and language as intersecting axes overlap and inform one another as facets of human experience.

The purpose of my conceptual organization is to analyze how the sea as a space suffuses each of these novels through three thematic approaches. I have selected seven novels which imagine alternatives to a constructed reality imposed on them and whose fluid approach to narrative framing suggest a collaborative, mutually reinforcing authenticity in direct opposition to any univocal claim to history, identity, or language. The tension between that which must be disinterred and that which must be made anew is taken up by each of the authors in this dissertation, particularly in terms of a correlation between the rewriting of identities and the transformative potential of collaborative storytelling in displacing the ideological distortion of history and language. In each chapter, I draw on interviews and personal narratives of the authors to articulate how their novels, in imagining storytelling communities, fictionalize and put into practice their theories of narratology. In my interpretations, I hope to illustrate a practice of closely reading "comparative seas" that can illuminate other texts situated at maritime margins.

CHAPTER II:

STORYTELLING AS COUNTER-MEMORY IN MARIE-CÉLIE AGNANT'S *LE LIVRE D'EMMA* AND GABRIELLA GHERMANDI'S *REGINA DI FIORI E DI PERLE*

Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* and Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* stage the collaborative act of storytelling as a form of resistance to state-sanctioned forgetting, revisionism, and suppression of colonial histories. Through the cultivation of community and collective memory, the titular storytellers mend a schism between the colonial past and the present. Describing *Le Livre d'Emma* as fiction, essay, and testimony, Agnant constructs within the text a genealogy of black women's experiences, tracing the traumatic echoes of slavery and Haiti's colonial past to present-day Montreal.[1] Ghermandi's first novel, *Regina di fiori e di perle*, published in 2007, similarly engages with both fictional and testimonial modes as partisans recollect and recount Ethiopian history from 1836 to the present, emphasizing the Italian occupation and Ethiopian resistance from 1935-1941. Resolution is articulated in these novels through repeated invocations of the sea, and the mobility of the storyteller who navigates the waters of history and memory. Approaching Agnant and Ghermandi through an aquacentric perspective allows us to ground a comparative study of the Mediterranean and Caribbean in literature, as these authors model rhetorical and thematic engagements with the sea to be explored in other maritime contexts.

The frame narratives of *Le Livre d'Emma* and *Regina di fiori e di perle* allow the storyteller and reader to move between spatio-temporal structures, a practice which

[1] "At first, I did not really know what form to give to Emma. Should it lean towards fiction or essay-testimony? […] We can talk about fiction but sometimes, even in *Emma*, I wonder which part is fiction and which part is the unconscious, my unconscious." All translations from this interview are mine. See Marie-Célie Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," interview by Florence Raymond Jurney. *The French Review* 79.2 (2005): 384-394.

evokes the shifting currents of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean and is integral to the storytellers' reconstruction of the past. This reconstruction relies on collective memory as a form of counter-memory, "a resignification of the past in the present [which] unsettles canonical cultural memory."[2] Agnant and Ghermandi employ frame narratives to "furnish all the constituents of a communicative situation"[3] which, as a form of cultural transmission, destabilizes the colonial archive through its unfixed, non-canonical, polyphony. In her discussion of the intersections of traumatic memory and storytelling, Giovanna Sansalvadore writes that "when memory is confronted with trauma, it becomes elusive, and in its literary version, is reliant on the continuity provided by the storyteller, who ensures the existence of the tale for future generations."[4] In these novels continuity is supplied by women writers and translators who take on the mediating roles of listener, curator, and storyteller.[5] The two frame narratives conclude in the present tense, gesturing beyond the literal and figurative constraints of the text while addressing the reader as a collaborator and participant in this storytelling tradition. Both novels bespeak the permeability of spatio-temporal dynamics and the fluidity of exile, themes which are pertinent to the figuration of the sea in contemporary literary studies.

The sea figures into postcolonial mobility and exile in the works of Marie-Célie

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2 By canonical cultural memory, Michael Rothberg is referring to Jan and Aleida Assmann's conceptualization of the term in their edited volume, *Memory in a Global Age*, elaborating on Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory. See Michael Rothberg, "Remembering Back: Cultural Memory, Colonial Legacies, and Postcolonial Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan, 368.

3 Werner Wolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, 189.

4 Giovanna Sansalvadore, "The uses of 'orality' in an Italian post-colonial text: Gabriella Ghermandi's *Queen of Flowers and Pearls* (2007)," *English Academy Review* 33.2 (2016): 21.

5 Elleke Boehmer's "Differential Publics – Reading (in) the Postcolonial Novel" presents the concept of postcolonial reading in response to Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique*. While not addressed in this essay, the postcoloniality of reading outlined here could be applied to novels utilizing frame narratives such as *Le Livre d'Emma* and *Regina di fiori e di perle*. See Elleke Boehmer, "Differential Publics – Reading (in) the Postcolonial Novel," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 4.1 (2017): 11-25.

Agnant and Gabriella Ghermandi and similarities may be found in the long history of forced migration that characterizes both the modern Mediterranean and the Caribbean. However, as Martin Munro notes in *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, with a nod to Glissant, exile cannot be universalized. African slaves' forced migration was geographical, cultural, and bodily which creates a specific experience of exile for later generations. This means that, after the dissolution of the slave trade in the Caribbean, "any further movement into exile from the islands does not take place against the background of a solid, rooted sense of self and place, but in the context of a fluid, unfixed, relational, and itinerant sense of belonging."[6] Agnant's Haitian-Canadian immigrants, Emma and Flore, are born into this exilic turbulence inherited from the historical trauma that characterizes both the islands and the sea itself. Although the sea is not explicitly taken up here as a frame by Munro, it is certainly evoked by the aquacentric language used to describe the particular "sense of belonging" that characterizes the Caribbean.

Reading the sea itself as a creative frame – and not as a body of water framed by land – most closely reflects the spirit of mobility that characterizes the earliest frame narratives and the works of Agnant and Ghermandi.[7] The latter's novel, while principally concerned with the Mediterranean Sea of the twentieth century, also acknowledges the historical legacy of migration and colonization in the region, dating from the Neolithic era.[8] The two texts cannot be compared on the basis of a temporal and geographic

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[6] Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat*, 254.

[7] "Travel and eyewitness reporting and similar externally organizing features appear […] in both Arabic and non-Arabic frame narratives." See Katherine Slater Gittes, "*The Canterbury Tales* and the Arabic Frame Tradition," *PMLA* 98.2 (1983): 241.

[8] "Long-distance travel and exchange are abundantly attested to from early prehistory onward, and Neolithic expansion across the Mediterranean has even been characterized as an essentially maritime

overlap; however, the sea figures predominantly in both as a source of both oppression and resistance. The same sea that brings colonial violence and exploitation is the sea that carries the storyteller to the source of the archive where she might, in turn, dismantle it with the stories she has collected and translated.

The Thresholds of Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma*

In light of contemporary discussions of the sea, Marie-Célie Agnant's novel provides a maritime frame that both recalls black women's inheritance of trauma and offers a means of working through it. Agnant describes one of the central themes of the novel as "la solitude des femmes, en particulier le rejet des femmes noires, leur aliénation, une aliénation que certaines finissent par intégrer" (the solitude of women, in particular the rejection of black women, their alienation, an alienation which some end up integrating).[9] The alienation black women face is due to an intersectional oppression of both race and gender. Colonization is often framed in terms of sexual violence and emasculation, creating a four-category hierarchy: European men, European women, African men ("native") and African women ("Other").[10] In a study of the impact of colonial polices on Yoruba women, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí writes that Western intellectuals played a significant role in constructing a reality of colonial Africa that (in addition to colonial policies) excluded black women, legitimizing male hegemony in contexts where women previously held positions of power. That is not to dismiss patriarchal cultural practices that existed prior to colonization, but it is to acknowledge that the oppression and

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phenomenon." See Cyprian Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World*, 215-17.

[9] Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 385.

[10] Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. "Colonizing Bodies and Minds: Gender and Colonialism." In *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, 340.

alienation of black women was not only enforced but exacerbated during the colonial period. The consequences of that internalized alienation are part of the inherited trauma of black women in Agnant's novel.

In "On Global Memory: Thoughts on the Barbaric Transmission of Culture," Homi Bhabha reminds us that "trauma is not simply something that howls from a distance, but it's something that is to be reconstituted and dealt with, and models of repression and working through are not entirely adequate."[11] Addressing the response her novel received upon publication, Agnant expressed her belief that slavery does not appear (or is repressed) in Haitian novels because the subject is taboo.[12] Instead, themes of Haitian literature tend to focus on the everyday and on contemporary politics, topics which are perceived to be immediately relevant to the nation.[13] *Le Livre d'Emma* engages with what is lost, hidden or unspoken because the taboo may also be "une manière de mesurer les dégâts de l'aliénation" (a way of measuring the damage of alienation).[14] This alienation (by Agnant's assessment unacknowledged by the Haitian literati who wish to distance themselves from an inherited trauma) also goes unacknowledged in the French national archives and canonical cultural memory which alternate between nostalgia for and repression of the colonial past.[15]

Because Agnant rejects the models of repression presented by metropolitan

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11 Homi Bhabha, "On Global Memory: Thoughts on the Barbaric Transmission of Culture," Forum on the Humanities and the Public World, Berkeley, 2008.

12 "When this book appeared, some people were astonished, as if, to a certain extent, they were wondering: what is the relationship between Haiti and slavery?" See Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 388.

13 Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 388.

14 See Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 388.

15 Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz's article on trauma and testimony in *Le Livre d'Emma* opens with a discussion of the institutional forgetting and colonial nostalgia that characterizes metropolitan France, citing, as an example, the 2005 effort to pass a memory law lauding the positive effects of the French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa. See Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz, "Le Trauma et le témoignage dans *Le Livre d'Emma* de Marie-Célie Agnant," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 64.3 (2010): 149-168.

France and contemporary Haitian literature, *Le Livre d'Emma* represents a mode of working through trauma that is not based on any established model. The author's approach to this legacy is, as she says, not to cultivate the memory of trauma per se but to make use of the clarity it brings to the relationship between past and present.[16] One of the prominent foci in trauma studies is this very inadequacy that Bhabha cites, particularly in the context of testimony – that is, the *in*adequacy of language, either written or spoken, to fully transmit the traumatic experience. It is the interplay between what can and cannot be expressed, whether silence is chosen or enforced, that underlies Agnant's novel. It is also committed to "understanding Emma's present from her past" while simultaneously resignifying the past in the present via the transmission of counter-memory.[17] Temporality becomes fluid in this text and it is space, rather than time, that figures most prominently in the organization of the narrative. This can be hinted at in the ambiguity of the novel's title. The question of whether Emma is the subject of a narrative or the author-agent of that narrative is dependent on where she is in relation to the frame. Agnant's use of this layered construction allows us to read a novel that is both written and in the process of being written.

Reading Agnant's 2005 interview alongside *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001) invites a collaborative interpretation of the work. As VèVè A. Clark, Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, and Madelon Sprengnether note in the introduction to their edited anthology, *Revising the Word and the World: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (1993), interviews have the potential to interpellate readers:

> More effectively than any other text, perhaps, the interview draws the public into the field of its construction. The effect, first on the interviewer or compiler, then

16 Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 388.
17 Agnant, "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant," 388.

> on the audience, is that of a dialogue or multilogue in which all are participants, all are involved. Furthermore, in its presentation of dialogue and the implied inclusion of others as readers, the interview as text can help to generate a desire for social change.[18]

The "desire for social change" has implications for exploring the inexplorable – what is taboo, what remains undocumented in History - at the heart of Agnant's novel. By including readers in the process of textual construction, the interview also develops their sense of agency as participants in the continued exploration of Agnant's themes through alternative texts and interpretative frames.

Collaborative interpretation is a particularly salient theme in this novel when one considers the role of Flore, and the broader question of what it is to translate or interpret. As a professional interpreter, Flore is put in the position of representing a group "dont on ne comprend ni le langage ni les codes" (whose language and codes are not understood).[19] She draws a distinction between *la langue* (the French language she shares with Dr. MacLeod) and *le langage* (which they do not share). For Flore, *le langage* encompasses "les métaphores, les exagérations, ces images empreintes d'une rare violence décrites par [Emma]" (the metaphors, the exagerations, these imprinted images of a rare violence described by [Emma]).[20] There are the codes that Flore and Emma share, that she is unwilling to interpret for the doctor and the committee to build their diagnosis. She distinguishes between interpreting these codes and translating Emma's words, revealing a conscious effort to provide only a literal translation of what the patient says. For Dr. MacLeod this literal translation is chaotic and incoherent.[21]

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[18] Clark, VèVè A., Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, and Madelon Sprengnether, eds. *Revising the Word and the World: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism,* 3.
[19] Marie-Célie Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 38. Translation is mine.
[20] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 63. Translation is mine.
[21] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 63.

Flore writes that the proof is in her interactions with the doctor: “je ne suis rien d’autre qu’un banal instrument entre les mains du docteur MacLeod et de son comité.” (I am nothing more than a trivial instrument in the hands of Doctor MacLead and his committee.)[22] The dehumanization she describes, whereby she is reduced to a tool whose function is to mediate between the doctor and his patient, is racialized in Agnant’s novel. But it can also stand in as a broader commentary on the way that translators and interpreters – and their editorial influences - are erased. Flore’s decision not to interpret Emma’s *langage et codes* defies the Venutian anxiety around the insidious domestication of translation, that which reconstitutes a text “in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language” and erases the translator.[23] Flore does not allow herself to be effaced for the benefit of the Canadian hospital committee and in fact, she collaborates with Emma and participates in the co-construction of these histories that have never been published.

Flore is understandably uncomfortable in her position as the model “other” who is both the same as and different from Emma because she can and does negotiate the *langage et codes* of the French language in a way that is legible to those in a position of authority. Dr. MacLeod and his committee task Flore with getting the patient to speak “sans détours, sans métaphores et autre pièges” (without detours, without metaphors and other traps).[24] It is not only a matter of being asked to interpret Emma’s *langage et codes* for those who exist outside of that speech community, but it is an intervention designed to change the way that Emma speaks. This domestication of Emma’s language involves linearity and no figurative language, extracting a chronological, factual account of what

[22] Agnant, *Le Livre d’Emma*, 39. Translation is mine.
[23] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 16.
[24] Agnant, *Le Livre d’Emma*, 38. Translation is mine.

brought her to kill her daughter. For Emma, the sequence of events leading up to Lola's death is irreducible from the *détours, métaphores et autre pièges* of the histories she recounts just as her dissertation project is irreducible. Despite the expectations of the doctor and his committee, Flore does not succeed in persuading Emma to adhere to Dr. MacLeod's language. She makes conscious choices to avoid implicating Emma through translation, and by the end of the novel, she has adopted the same *langage et codes* as Emma, translating those into French to the confusion of the police and Dr. MacLeod.

The Water Bearer of Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma*

Agnant's novel focuses on women - specifically on communities of women - as disruptive to preexisting configurations of fiction and reality. The sea becomes aligned with the feminine as Emma integrates it into her storytelling practice and reconfiguration of histories. This alignment evokes previous scholarship on cultural and historical associations between women and water. For example, Sherry B. Ortner's 1972 analysis, "Is Male to Female as Nature is to Culture?" applies Simone de Beauvoir's framework contrasting feminine (natural) reproduction to masculine (artificial) creation to the view that women's physiological functions (menstruation, pregnancy, nursing) and social roles (child-rearing) bring them closer to nature than men.[25] These physiological functions signal the source of the association between femininity and water in the Western tradition, an association which has been critiqued and analyzed by feminist scholars - Toril Moi, Mary Ellman, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous - as a means of subverting "the

[25] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Male to Female as Nature is to Culture?" 358.

Enlightenment project that named Universal Man as hegemonic subject."[26] The (feminine) sea, depicted as unpredictable and inconsistent, is framed in contrast to the (masculine) grounded principles of reason and rationality. Adriana Cavarero, in her book *For More Than One Voice*, reads the contrast of feminine (embodied, singing) and masculine (semantic, speaking) voice through the classical figuration of the monstrous woman in mythology. Citing the misogynistic justifications for silencing these women – the Siren's songs exist outside of the realm of logic, the mermaid is seductive and therefore dangerous – she conceives the drowning of the sailor-fisherman in mythology as a "return to water" that corresponds to the amniotic fluid of the womb.[27]

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's collaborative project, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, describes the monster as a counterpoint to the domestic angel, both images constructed by male authors to reduce women to one of two archetypes.[28] The monster-woman "embodies intransigent female autonomy" and male authors used this trope to vilify female resistance, aggression and independence.[29] The "monstrous feminine" of the 1980s becomes synonymous with the abject and the maternal figure in the works of Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed, possessing the potential for violence and fecundity. The act of infanticide by a mother is perceived as monstrous, and it is coded as unnatural because it defies the perceived "natural" role of women as nurturers and mothers.

Infanticide in the historical context of slavery, as Antoinette Marie Sol writes,

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[26] Astrid Neimanis, "Alongside the Right to Water, a Posthumanist Feminist Imaginary," *Journal of Human Right and the Environment* 5(1): 5-24. Cited in Cara Berger, "A Chain of Creation, Continuation, Continuity: Feminist Dramaturgy and the Matter of the Sea." *Performance Research* 21.1 (2016): 3.
[27] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 108.
[28] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 17.
[29] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 28.

"est, à l'origine, un acte de générosité et de ravissement, d'euthanasie et de vol. Tuer un enfant destiné à l'esclavage recèle des motivations complexes et contradictoires." (was originally an act of generosity and of rapture, euthanasia and theft. Killing a child destined for slavery has complex and contradictory motivations.)[30] In Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma*, the titular character is confined to a psychiatric hospital for the murder of her daughter. This act reveals the inextricable weaving of a traumatic memory borne from slavery through Emma's past, present and future. Her interpreter (and the novel's narrator), Flore, meets with a social worker who has collected newspaper clippings and photographs sensationalizing Emma's crime:

> L'enfance difficile d'Emma a fait la une et la photo de la petite Lola, étalée en première page de tous ces quotidiens, son corps menu, déchiqueté, s'est retrouvé dans les boîtes à ordures de toutes les demeures, parmi les papiers sales, les bouts de chiffons et les détritus emportés par les éboueurs. Pour illustrer la photo, une légende, ou plutôt un cliché : "Une Noire sacrifie son enfant… Une affaire de vaudou?"
>
> (Emma's difficult childhood made the headlines and the photo of little Lola, spread out on the front page of all these daily newspapers, her tiny, shredded body, was found in the garbage boxes of all the houses, among the dirty papers, rag ends and rubbish washed away by the garbage collectors. To illustrate the photo, a legend, or rather a cliché: "A Black woman sacrifices her child… a case of voodoo?")[31]

Vodou arrived in Haiti by way of African practitioners brought as slaves from West and Central Africa. As Haitian poet René Depestre notes in a 1967 interview with Aimé Césaire, "voodoo was an important element in the development of our national culture," and to have it casually misrepresented in a Canadian newspaper headline is erasure of

[30] Antoinette Marie Sol. "Histoire(s) et traumatisme(s): L'Infanticide dans le roman féminin antillais." *French Review* 81.5 (Avril 2008): 971. Translation is mine.
[31] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 15-16. All subsequent translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

that historical and national significance.[32] Flore remarks that the headline is a cliché, criticizing the racist reductionism that associates Antillean black bodies with vodou, the practice of which is vilified as dark magic. This vilification is an echo of oppressive colonial policies in Haiti under the 1685 Code Noir which forbade the open practice of African religions and forced conversion to Catholicism on those enslaved. A lack of awareness of vodou conflates it with the unrelated practice of ritual human sacrifice, imposing a superstitious – if not supernatural – motivation for Emma's actions. The newspaper reproduces this racialized allegation of premeditated violence alongside an exploitative front-page photo of Lola's body.

Linked to these sensationalized accusations is the absence of Emma's own voice. Flore meets the titular character at the behest of Dr. Ian MacLeod, who is unable to understand or translate his patient's words. He informs Flore that Emma refuses to communicate in a language other than her mother tongue, thus requiring an interpreter. Occasionally, he explains, Emma will slip into French: "Cependant, sitôt elle s'en rend compte, vite elle se referme, et on n'obtient plus rien d'elle." (However, as soon as she realizes it, she quickly clams up, and we get nothing more from her.)[33] What Dr. McLeod describes is not silence – "elle ne fait que parler, parler, sans jamais répondre aux questions" (she just talks, talks, never answering questions) – but rather a refusal to allow someone else to speak for her, to take liberties with her words and misrepresent them.[34] MacLeod's frustration stems from his inability to access and parse Emma's language to fit his diagnosis of her condition: "Vous comprenez, disait-il, d'une voix agitée d'un petit

[32] René Depestre, "An Interview with Aimé Césaire," Trans. Maro Riofrancos. *Discourse on Colonialism*, 91.
[33] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 8.
[34] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 9.

tremblement et le visage légèrement crispé, mon diagnostic fera sans doute la différence lors du procès!" (You understand, he said, in a voice shaken by a small tremor and his face slightly tense, my diagnosis will undoubtedly make the difference during the trial!)[35] MacLeod's task is to transform Emma's (feminine) iterations, framed as illogical and irrational in the spirit of the Siren's songs, into a legible and coherent (masculine) narrative for a court of law. To employ Michel Foucault's theory of *savoir-pouvoir*, a term first coined in his 1976 volume of *Histoire de la sexualité,* knowledge and power are integrated and interdependent. Knowledge empowers Dr. MacLeod to speak for and about Emma through his diagnosis, disempowering her as a patient, woman, non-expert. Furthermore, this power dynamic is racialized as Dr. MacLeod is positioned as the white male (citizen) authority in opposition to the black (immigrant) woman. MacLeod's emotional outburst reveals the threat Emma's language poses, destabilizing his authority as an expert of her condition; if he cannot understand her language, then he cannot instrumentalize it to further his own narrative.

Emma's refusal to engage with those who do not speak her mother tongue comes after two failed attempts to defend her doctoral thesis on slavery. She informs Flore that she has books in which history is "tronquée, lobotomisée, excisée, mâchée, triturée puis recrachée en un jet informe."[36] And this (lowercased) history is mutilated in a progression that begins with external (or superficial) severing (tronquée), followed by penetration into and removal of viscera (lobotomisée, excisée), before consumption and regurgitation. This is the dismemberment of black bodies, specifically women's bodies, and Emma's choice of the word "lobotomisée" is particularly striking because it not only

[35] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 8.
[36] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 22.

implies a violation, but an imposed docility that comes from reducing brain function. In the context of dismembering women's bodies, and Dr. MacLeod's efforts to diagnose Emma's madness, one cannot help but recall the historical use of the lobotomy to manage female hysteria. The "jet informe" that comes out of this process is the colonial History which students – and exiles – in France and Canada have access to, and this masticated gristle becomes the foundation of their understanding of their own ancestry, homeland, and circumstances abroad.

Over the course of their sessions, she reveals to Flore her relationship to France, where she first attempted to complete her doctorate. She describes a country "avec lequel je ne ressentais aucun lien particulier sauf que l'histoire avait voulu que je m'instruise dans sa langue. Au fond de moi, cependant, mon projet prenait forme : explorer les routes qu'avaient jadis suivies les grands navires." (with which I did not feel any particular connection except that history had wanted me to learn in its language. Deep down, however, my project was taking shape: exploring the routes that the big boats once followed.)[37] Emma describes a consuming "soif de comprendre" that develops from the stories her grandmother's cousin tells her about their family. It is this thirst that motivates Emma to pursue higher education and to write her dissertation. Citing the Glissantian theory of the inexplorable History of colonialism, Lesley Curtis argues that Emma "nous montre que l'inexplorable doit devenir l'explorable si l'on espère échapper aux effets continus d'un passé colonial" (shows us that the inexplorable must become the explorable if we hope to escape the continuous effects of a colonial past).[38] It is no coincidence that Emma herself characterizes her project as an exploration, resonating not

[37] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 128.
[38] Lesley Curtis, "« Vite elle se referme » : L'opacité dans *Le Livre d'Emma* de Marie-Célie Agnant," *Women in French Studies* 21 (2013): 68. Translation is mine.

only with Glissant's *Discours* but also the manifesto *Éloge de la créolité*. Emma's exploration of her thesis topic takes a conventional path in pouring over "les grands livres" for written documentation of the source of her family's suffering, but this information was not recorded in any canonical French text.[39] Instead, Emma informs Flore that: "C'est dans leurs cales que tout s'est écrit, dans les plis de la mer, dans le vent gorgé de sel et dans cette odeur de sang." (It is in their holds that everything is written, in the folds of the sea, in the wind filled with salt and in that smell of blood.)[40] Agnant's phrase "les plis de la mer" is a rich and multifaceted image, describing the undulations of the waves, the layers of water and sediment that bury shipwrecked Antillean histories, through employment of a word that also reads as both textual and corporeal. *Un pli* can be both a letter and a crease in a sheet of paper. This creasing can also refer to wrinkles of skin, which reframes the other metaphors: le vent *gorgé* evokes the throat, the act of swallowing and tasting the air, which is then followed by the scent of blood. At once, Agnant is bringing together the sea, the body, and the text as the archive for the source of her family's curse.

Emma's thesis is rejected by her committee for a lack of coherence, defined by Dr. MacLeod as an inability on her part to "démontrer certains faits qu'elle avanc[e]" (demonstrate certain facts that she advances).[41] Curtis notes, "la nécessité de "démontrer certains faits" renvoie à une notion occidentale de ce qu'est la compréhension" (the necessity of 'demonstrating certain facts' refers to a Western notion of what understanding is).[42] Specifically, the question of how well a scholar knows her field or

[39] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 117.
[40] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 118.
[41] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 65.
[42] Curtis, « Vite elle se referme », 69.

can predict where it is headed is highly contextualized. Within European and North American academic frameworks, a scholar defends the relevance and the legitimacy of her project through a logical presentation of facts and evidentiary support as well as engagement with established figures in the field. Emma is described as having put forth a project which does not correspond to any preexisting framework because the sources she draws from cannot be found in historical archives. Because this documentation only exists in the sea, the air and the body, it cannot be transcribed through traditional means.

Traditional in this context refers to those "great books" on slavery, and the practice of citing the (white, European) narrative that has been canonized and perpetuated as fact. Emma suggests that it was not her argument her committee took issue with, but rather the fact that a black woman would challenge the dominant narrative of slavery and aspire to write history.[43] Emma's assertion that her committee members opposed her counter-narrative evokes the same division between History/histories described in *Éloge de la creolité*. The very notion of pluralizing the history of slavery is rejected as incoherent, as disjointed, because the inclusion of marginalized voices no longer resembles the dominant narrative.

It is more than the pluralization of history that Emma's committee finds unacceptable, but the fact that Emma produces a history of slavery that – like the novel itself – is both written and in the process of being written:

> Tout ce passé n'a de passé que le nom, Flore. Il s'obstine à demeurer toujours là, nous guettant derrière l'écran obscur de l'oubli. C'est de la que vient ma décision d'étudier l'histoire de l'esclavage. Mais tu sais déjà ce qu'ils m'ont fait. Ils ont refusé d'entendre ma voix. Et moi, je voulais écrire ce livre qui, lorsqu'on l'ouvrirait, jamais plus ne se refermerait. Mais tu sais déjà tout.
>
> (All this past has only passed in name, Flore. It stubbornly remains there,

[43] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 116.

> watching us behind the dark screen of oblivion. This is where my decision to study the history of slavery came from. But you already know what they did to me. They refused to hear my voice. And I wanted to write this book which, when you open it, will never close again. But you already know everything.) [44]

Emma brings the generational trauma and consequences of slavery into the present, threatening the stability of the History which establishes a univocal (and *coherent*) account of the past that cannot be altered. Emma conceived of her dissertation project – as many doctoral students do – not as an end in itself, as an exercise to be completed for her degree, but as the first draft of a book she intended to publish. In writing a book that will never close, Emma describes a dismantling of the "l'écran obscur de l'oubli" that haunts her and all who have inherited this trauma. It is a means of exploring the inexplorable and the book's forever openness is an inclusive invitation for engagement and working through of a traumatic past that remains unacknowledged and untreated in the "great books."

> In *Le discours antillais*, Édouard Glissant writes:
>
> "Fanon dit qu'il ne veut pas être esclave de l'esclavage. Cela sous-entend pour moi qu'on ne saurait se contenter d'ignorer le phénomène historique de l'esclavage; qu'il ne faut pas en subir de manière pulsionnelle le trauma persistant. Le dépassement est exploration projective. L'esclave est d'abord celui qui ne sait pas. L'esclave de l'esclavage est celui qui ne veut pas savoir."
>
> (Fanon says that he doesn't want to be a slave to slavery. This implies to me that one cannot be content with ignoring the historical phenomenon of slavery; that one should not be subjected to a persistent trauma. Overcoming is a projective exploration. The slave is first of all the one who does not know. The slave of slavery is the one who doesn't want to know.)[45]

To have her thesis, and her book project, rejected by those "qui ne veulent pas savoir" and who are determined to gatekeep History was also a rejection of the possibility of

[44] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 158-159.
[45] Glissant, *Discours*, 221. Translation is mine.

dépassement for Emma and her daughter.[46]

The Experience of Exile in *Le Livre d'Emma*

Le Livre d'Emma opens with Flore's recollection of meeting Emma for the first time, signaling her role as the mediator of the titular character's fixation: "Pendant longtemps, elle n'avait eu de mots que pour décrire le bleu intense qui enserre en permanence un lambeau de terre abandonnée au milieu de l'océan, là où ses yeux s'étaient ouverts sur le monde." (For a long time, the only words she could utter described the intense blue that permanently encircles a strip of abandoned land in the middle of the ocean, the place where her eyes had first opened on the world.)[47] In both the French original and the translation, spatial and temporal distance are established between Emma and the island of her birth. The only constant is this "intense blue" which – in the present tense – surrounds the island. The island itself is described as a "lambeau de terre," lambeau being a hyperonym for several words in English: scrap, tatter, shred (translated as "strip" by Ellis). There is a violence implied in the use of this word, evoking the image of an island that has been damaged by an external force. It is established through this description that Emma was born into trauma; her eyes first opened on the world in this place that has been exploited by those who are gone. This exploitation creates a fragmentation of identity, both for the island and for Emma. Emma's decision to relocate from Grand-Lagon to France and to Canada complicates her identity as an exile. One might be inclined to consider her an expatriate, one who voluntarily lives in an alien country, but

[46] See Lesley Curtis, " « Vite elle se referme »: L'opacité dans *Le Livre d'Emma* de Marie-Célie Agnant," *Women in French Studies* 21 (2013): 68-78.

[47] Agnant. *Le Livre d'Emma*, 7. Translation by Zilpha Ellis. See Marie-Célie Agnant, *The Book of Emma*, trans. Zilpha Ellis, 7.

in Saidian terms, "exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it or it happens to you."[48] Emma occupies both categories and is twice-exiled. Within the frame narrative, as a woman institutionalized in an asylum, she is subject to exile from society. She is also born into exile. Emma's response to the question of why she immigrated to Canada is to speak of a collective decision to leave by way of the "chemin des bateaux." By mapping the path of immigration onto the routes of slavery, Emma draws a direct parallel between that history and her present exile. Slavery and its traumatic legacy constitute an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place,"[49] such that Emma refers to the island of Grand-Lagon as a cursed land: "cette eau qui la baigne depuis le jour de sa naissance, cette eau, sans son bleu si bleu, cache des siècles de sang vomi des cales des négriers, sang de tous ces nègres que l'on jetait pardessus bord. C'est ainsi que la malédiction est entrée. Elle s'est infiltrée dans l'eau des rivières, dans celle que nous buvons, elle s'est mêlée à notre sang, l'a corrompu." (The water that has washed it since the day it was born, this water, with its blue so blue, hides centuries of blood vomited from the holds of the slave ships, blood from all the blacks that were thrown overboard. That's how the curse arrived. It infiltrated the water of our rivers, the water that we drink, it mixed with our blood, spoiled it.)[50] Emma repeatedly associates herself with the water, describing her skin as so dark it appears to be blue, not unlike the depths of the sea untouched by sunlight. Her former lover, Nickolas, tells Flore that Emma is like the sea, serene yet unpredictable. And in this passage, her blood and the blood of all residents of Grand-Lagon is mixed with cursed seawater. She emphasizes the aquacentric nature of the human body and whether the implication is deliberate or not,

[48] Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile" in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays,* 181-184.
[49] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 173.
[50] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 112. Translation by Ellis. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 139-140.

"science explains that we emerged from the sea – our blood a tide of oceanic ions. The chemical formula for blood is very like the formula for seawater."[51] Here, this scientific fact is compounded with the continual change and recycling of water, the dissolution and recombination of molecules ad infinitum. The water Emma was born into retains traces of the same water that brought the slave ships to Grand-Lagon. The anxiety of having inherited this exile is part of what drives Emma to violence. Following the second rejection of her thesis – the denial of her voice and the voices of those who have died - Emma becomes convinced that the curse in her blood has been passed on to her child and, seeing no way to cure it, commits infanticide.

As Flore and Emma grow closer over the course of their sessions, Emma confesses to her listener: "Mais avant toute chose, je voudrais te parler de quelques femmes. Après elles, tous les bruits se tairont. Dans ma gorge, dans ma tête, dans mon sang, ce sera le silence absolu." (More than anything else, I would like to talk to you about several women. After them, all the sounds will be silent. In my throat, in my head, in my blood, there will be absolute silence.)[52] These women belong to Emma's lineage and it is her own ancestry that she feels compelled to share with Flore. The first story Emma recounts is that of her own fraught relationship with her maternal aunt and mother, both of whom rejected her for being too dark-skinned. Through her grandmother's cousin, Emma traces the lines of her family to her Bantu ancestor, Kilima, abducted and enslaved as a child on the island of Saint-Domingue. It is significant that Emma selects Flore to be the recipient and curator of her family's stories, as this satisfies her compulsion to speak of these experiences without the risk of passing on the blood-borne

[51] Yaeger, "Tragedy of the Commons," 524.
[52] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 105. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 132.

curse that she believes afflicts all residents of Grand-Lagon.

The impetus for her storytelling is the desire for silence. Once she has passed these stories on, "tous les bruits se tairont. Dans ma gorge, dans ma tête, dans mon sang, ce sera le silence absolu" (all the sounds will be silent. In my throat, in my head, in my blood, there will be absolute silence).[53] What is most significant about this silence is that it is not forced on her, it is not the result of neglect or denied identity. This silence signifies Emma's reclamation of her body which will no longer serve as a conduit for others. Flore describes Emma's physicality as she talks, remarking that "son corps se vidait de ces images surgies du fond d'une mémoire ancienne, paroles extraites d'archives enfouies dans ses entrailles" (her body emptied itself of the images thrust up from the depths of ancient memory, words extracted from the archives buried in her entrails).[54] What she describes is the essence of Emma's thesis, what she could not publish. There are two archives: the first, which constitutes the dominant narrative on slavery would be History collected by the French and the second is inscribed on Emma's body. The only way to relieve oneself of that burden is to share it with someone who can read the archive, recognizing that black women's bodies carry these histories of trauma and loss from generation to generation. The silence comes once the stories, the voices, the memories, the archive itself has been passed on to another not only recipient but curator; this silence may be interpreted as a kind of peace, relief from the seemingly inescapable curse and the condition of exile itself, unsettled, decentered, and disruptive.

Through the relationship between Emma and Flore, Agnant suggests that there is a power in orality, in storytelling, in collective memory, and in female community which

[53] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 105. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 132.
[54] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 118. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 146.

not only resists History but also relieves the burden of this inheritance of trauma. Exiles are those who have been cut off from, in the Saidian definition of the term, their roots, their land, and their past.[55] To recover this connection, even though a return to uncontaminated roots and land (which exist only in the pre-colonial past) may not be possible, Emma and Flore collaborate to translate, transcribe, interpret, and articulate histories of both roots and *routes*. In passing on her histories to Flore, Emma ensures that the past will not remain obscured and unexplored, that it will be acknowledged and worked through in the present through the narrator (who describes herself as having been reborn with Emma's guidance).

The novel ends with Flore's mental projection of Emma, speaking to her as a specter, who has committed suicide by drowning in a river outside of the hospital. Flore describes her death as a return: "[Emma] disait toujours, elle disait sans cesse qu'elle reprendrait un jour la route des grands bateaux" to rejoin the others.[56] In framing Emma's death as a return, Curtis writes that "il faut aussi noter que la possibilité de ce retour ajoute à la présence du passé colonial" (it should also be noted that the possibility of this return adds to the presence of the colonial past).[57] On the one hand, we can read this scene as a moment that exemplifies Emma's statement that the past is only designated as such by those who call it 'past'. In this novel, time as measured by memory, community and relationships (as opposed to an affixation such as *post*colonialism or *pre*colonialism) is fluid and external demarcations of past, present and future can be harmful and alienating in their linearity. What Agnant seems to be advocating for in this novel is circulation and permeation when it comes to representations of time and space, such that

[55] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 140.
[56] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 163.
[57] Curtis, 27. Translation is mine.

Emma can be reunited with the spirits of those who have died several generations before her, and that she can find her way from a river in Montreal to the "route des grands bateaux" in the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. This permeability is also reflected in the conclusion of the novel, as the frame narrative – and novel itself - ends with spectral Emma's voice speaking to Flore in the intimate present. The divisions between these two women, and the framing of Emma's stories, are folded into one another in the end.

Reading *Regina di fiori e di perle* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman

In *Le Livre d'Emma*, ancestral histories are mediated through Emma as the conduit and last surviving member of her family. Flore receives these transgenerational histories through the relationship she cultivates with Emma, framing the bond between one speaker and her listener/interpreter. In contrast to Agnant's novel, Ghermandi's Mahlet speaks to several former partisans and elders of her community whose voices are preserved as she transcribes what she has heard from each of them. Orality and collaboration, while crucial components of the (re)construction of histories for both storytellers, are approached in different ways. Ghermandi places a heavy emphasis on stylistic polyphony because while Mahlet is our mediator, she has access to sources that Emma does not. Emma is institutionalized in Montréal, and her doubled exile has severed all ties to the world outside of the hospital. Mahlet is free to move between Italy and Ethiopia, and the estrangement she experiences abroad and upon returning to her village after the death of a beloved elder is distinct from Emma's. The two women have very different relationships to mobility (and the extent to which it is limited or not) which in

turn informs their accessibility to various spatial constructs.

In a 2008 interview with Federica Sossi, Ghermandi discusses the tension between *Storia*, History as recorded in books with "significant" dates and names, and *le storie*, defined as personal histories.[58] This distinction between History and histories in the context of postcolonial studies is a symptom of what Spivak defines as the epistemic violence of imperialism.[59] *History* is a narrative of reality established as normative, presented as objective and unbiased in contrast to the inherently subjective *histories* of individuals.[60] It is the former which constitutes the colonial archive, strictly maintained and cultivated to exclude and to silence the latter. It is not the *Storia* / *storie* division itself that sets Ghermandi's work apart from other postcolonial writers, but rather her authorial approach: "Ecco a me piace fare emergere la coralità delle storie che possono dare una dimensione globale, locale, singola et plurale al contempo." (Hence why I like to emphasize the chorus of histories which can give a global, local, singular, and plural dimension all at once.)[61] She describes the capacity of historical polyphony to create a dimension simultaneously global, local, singular, and plural.

Intersections of time, space, the individual, and the communal contrast the multi-dimensional inclusivity of Ghermandi's novel to Italy's national narrative. Further contrasts can be read within the title itself. Mahlet, both recipient and storyteller, is positioned as an African queen, a subversion of the exoticized and eroticized colonialist motif that is elaborated upon in the work of Clarissa Clò. As the titular queen, she becomes the cultural bearer and the vessel of her people's memories, rendered

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58 Gabriella Ghermandi, "Dialogo a distanza con Gabriella Ghermandi," interview by Federica Sossi (2008). Retrieved from storiemigranti.org.
59 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 78.
60 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 78.
61 See Gabriella Ghermandi, "Dialogo," 2008. Translation is mine.

metaphorically as flowers and pearls.[62] The author's choice of metaphor is striking in two ways. The pairing of the flowers and the pearls invites comparisons of land and sea, of the ephemeral and the long-lasting. These are themes that carry through the novel, emphasizing the spatio-temporal preoccupations of the text. As a vessel, Mahlet becomes the one who carries the flowers and wears the pearls of her people, both preserving and publicly displaying their struggles.

Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* (*Queen of Flowers and Pearls*) juxtaposes two narrative modes. The frame narrative is structured as a *Bildungsroman* centered on the coming-of-age of an Ethiopian girl, Mahlet, in the present-day. To classify Ghermandi's frame narrative as a *Bildungsroman* requires us to contextualize it in the transnational postcolonial context of twenty-first century Ethiopia and Italy. The term *Bildungsroman* is a neologism of the German "Bildung" – formation or education – and "roman" or novel, coined by Karl Simon Morgenstern. The nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman*, as defined by Franco Moretti and other scholars, is a novel of individual (white, male) formation. Though the formula varies based on historical and national contexts, the traditional narrative of the Bildungsroman depicts the young man's grappling with social instability and class mobility, resulting in one of two outcomes: acceptance and assimilation, or resistance and death.[63] Moretti explains that those characteristics which define the *Bildungsroman* "as a form: wide cultural formation, professional mobility, full social freedom – for a long time, the west European middle-class man held a virtual monopoly on these" to the exclusion of women, the working

[62] Clarissa Clò, "African Queens and Italian History: The Cultural Politics of Memory and Resistance in Teatro Delle Albe's *Lunga vita all'albero* and Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle*," *Research in African Literatures* 41.4 (2010): 26-42.

[63] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture*. Trans. Albert Sbragia, ix.

class, and people of color.[64]

One aspect of the European model which can be broadly applied to other contexts is that "it centers on the moral, educational, and/or psychological coming-of-age of its protagonist, that protagonist's passage from youth to adulthood."[65] The traditional *Bildungsroman* is a quest narrative as the protagonist navigates the transition into adolescence and adulthood, and as in nineteenth century examples, education plays a pinnacle role in Mahlet's development. It is established at the beginning of the novel that Mahlet's curiosity motivates her to explore parts of the house she is not permitted in, to eavesdrop on adults' conversations, and to listen to stories. At age eleven, the narrator overhears her mother lament that she can no longer be kept in the house. Acknowledging that as true, Mahlet describes "quella spinta incontrollata, quella voglia di stare fuori, e mi sentivo pure in diritto di farlo, ma lei si arrabbiava e mi accusava di disobidienza" (that uncontrollable urge, that desire to be out, and I felt I had the right to do so, but she would get angry and accuse me of being disobedient).[66] Adolescence is described as a river pushing Mahlet forward and into the world of adults; it is also accompanied by increased freedom as she joins her cousins at the Saturday Market. While working in a shop on the edge of the market, Mahlet is exposed to the patrols of armed soldiers and curfew, directly referencing the oppressive regime of Mengistu Hailè Mariam's military junta in Ethiopia (1977-1991).[67]

Mahlet's growing awareness of her country's past and present is one of

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[64] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, ix-x.
[65] Simon Hay, "*Nervous Conditions*, Lukacs, and the Postcolonial Bildungsroman," *Genre* 26.3 (2013): 317.
[66] Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori*, 63. All English translations of *Regina di fiori e di perle* are by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto unless otherwise noted. See Gabriella Ghermandi, *Queen of Flowers and Pearls*, trans. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto, 65.
[67] Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori*, 81.

resistance, to Italian occupation and to the current regime, and education abroad (in Europe or in the United States) is represented as both resistance and empowerment. This empowerment is not framed in terms of individual growth but as knowledge obtained for the reconstruction of Ethiopia.[68] In the classic *Bildungsroman*, education is a link between the individual and integration into society, but in *Regina di fiori e di perle* it is a revolutionary take on education. Education is not presented as a threshold the postcolonial subject must cross to integrate into European society, but rather it is described as a font of knowledge to be brought back to Ethiopia and shared for the good of the country. There is a collective awareness and encouragement of societal improvement through education and reintegration of the youth into the community. The middle-class privilege that allows one to pursue education abroad is not excluding (as Moretti classifies them) the "workers" because the educational opportunity will benefit everyone.

Mahlet is motivated to study abroad in Italy for a similar purpose, with the expectation that she will return to Ethiopia well-equipped to contribute to the reconstruction of her country. The alienating experience of leaving home to pursue education is one trait of the classic *Bildungsroman* as is the isolation Mahlet continues to experience upon her initial return to Ethiopia, where the influence of her time abroad has marked her as 'not belonging'. A postcolonial *Bildungsroman* may be characterized by the question of how a colonial subject comes of age and what it means for that subject to assimilate into society. Mahlet's coming-of-age occurs two generations after the short-lived but impactful colonization of Ethiopia by Italy, and it can be classified as a postcolonial *Bildungsroman* for its unique two-fold approach to assimilation. Mahlet's

[68] Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori*, 92.

assimilation into Ethiopian society post-1991 is framed as her acceptance of her role as the community's storyteller and as a writer. However, this role is constituted through the social relations she develops as listener/recipient of others' stories, enfolding Mahlet back into her community. The second manifestation of assimilation is through Mahlet's manuscript bringing her village's (colonial) past into the (postcolonial) present, a form of reconstruction that links generations together. The progress of the individual (Mahlet) frames and is furthered by her relationships with others, first within the novel but then in its conclusion interpellating the Italian reader as part of this storytelling practice.

Ghermandi's *Coralità* and the Oral Storytelling Tradition[69]

The stories Mahlet collects from the members of her village about Italian occupation of Ethiopia during the Fascist era (1935-1941) evoke an oral literary tradition; this tradition "used to describe the 'self' of each individual storyteller has its ideological basis in a communal identity, and this adds another narrative layer to the book: this represents a drawing on a traditional African storytelling mode."[70] Mahlet chooses the path of the expatriate when she applies for – and receives – a scholarship to study Economics in Italy. This decision is encouraged by the elders of her village; in the early pages of the novel, Mahlet recounts her favorite elder Yacob's words: "Tienila stretta quella curiosità e raccogli tutte le storie che puoi. Un giorno sarai la nostra voce che racconta. Attraverserai il mare che hanno attraversato Pietro e Paolo e porterai le nostre storie nella terra degli italiani. Sarai la voce della nostra storia che non vuole essere dimenticata."

[69] *Coralità*, translated in English as chorality, refers to the multiple voices which come together to create and maintain an oral storytelling tradition.

[70] Giovanna Sansalvadore, "The uses of 'orality' in an Italian post-colonial text: Gabriella Ghermandi's *Queen of Flowers and Pearls* (2007)," *English Academy Review* 33.2 (2016): 22.

(Hold on tight to that curiosity of yours and collect all the stories you can. One day you'll be the voice that will tell our stories. You will cross the same sea that Peter and Paul crossed, and you will take our stories to the land of the Italians. You will be the voice of our history that doesn't want to be forgotten.)[71] Mahlet's crossing of the Mediterranean Sea is coded as both a trial and a mission through the intertextual references to Peter and Paul. According to church tradition, Peter crossed the sea and was martyred in Rome. And the New Testament's Book of Acts recounts Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his subsequent shipwreck on the island of Malta, interrupting his transport to Rome, where he was to face charges before the emperor.

Yacob compares Mahlet's journey to that of fledgling Christian apostles persecuted for their evangelism in what is now Italy, signaling a tradition of this sea as a means by which the marginalized gain access and speak back to power.[72] Mahlet is compelled by a communal, not an individual, desire to acquire the colonizer's language and to use that language to stage an intervention, to give voice to those stories which have been lost or neglected by the "institutional denial of the historical realities" of colonialism.[73] Sossi notes during her interview with Ghermandi a tension in the novel between the plurality of histories from Ethiopia and what she refers to as "un vuoto di storia" (an absence of history) in Italy, a canonical cultural *forgetting* of the atrocities

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[71] Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2007), 6. See Bellesia-Contuzzi and Poletto, *Queen*, 2. Yacob later reiterates his expectations of Mahlet, the storyteller: "Then make a solemn promise in front of the icon of the Virgin Mary. When you grow up you will write my story, the story of those years, and you will take it to Italy, so that the Italians won't be allowed to forget" (p. 58).

[72] Christianity in the region dates back to the Aksumite Empire (what is now northern Ethiopia and Eritrea), arriving in the 4th century by way of merchants and making the Ethiopian Church the oldest pre-colonial Christian church on the continent.

[73] Sansalvadore, "The uses of 'orality'," 18.

committed in Africa.[74] This archival void stems in part from "the collapse of Italian colonialism in the context of wider military and political defeat" during World War II and a desire to distance the nation from this legacy.[75] The result is a nostalgic and revisionist reframing of the colonial period. Evidence of this can be seen, for example, in former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's defense of Benito Mussolini's dictatorship. The prime minister stated in 2013 that "il fatto delle leggi razziali è stata la peggiore colpa di un leader, Mussolini, che per tanti altri versi invece aveva fatto bene" (The initiative of [anti-Semitic] racial laws was the worst mistake of a leader, Mussolini, who in many other ways did well).[76] His remarks reflect the canonical cultural memory of Italy which sees itself as a benign presence in Africa. The anti-Semitic and discriminatory racial laws to which Berlusconi refers were instituted in both Italy and the colonies from 1938 to 1943, restricting the rights of Italian Jews and prohibiting sexual relations and marriage between "un cittadino italiano di razza ariana con persona appartenente ad altra razza" (an Italian citizen of the Aryan race with a person belonging to another race).[77] In disregarding, among Mussolini's crimes, the dictator's instituted censorship and use of propaganda to justify the violence perpetrated against Italian Jews and indigenous inhabitants of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Libya, Berlusconi's remarks reflect the canonical cultural memory of Italy, which sees itself as both a passive participant in World War II and as a benign presence in Africa. The latter may also read through Berlusconi's laudation of Mussolini's legacy as generally positive, which implicitly

[74] Gabriella Ghermandi, "Dialogo a distanza con Gabriella Ghermandi," n.p.
[75] Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, "Introduction," in *Italian Colonialism*, 1-9.
[76] See Silvio Berlusconi's Keynote Speech, Inauguration of the Monument Dedicated to Italian Jews Deported During the Shoah, Milan, 2013. Translation is mine.
[77] See "Leggi Razziali in Italia," Documenti Storici 1935–1945, July 1, 2011. Accessed November 25, 2018. https://cronologia.leonardo.it, article 1. Translation is mine.

enfolds Italian colonialism into his successes as a leader.

This historical revisionism reflects the two-fold marginalization of Italian colonialism within Italy's own discourses and within the larger context of European colonialism.[78] Italy is not considered a major colonial power when compared, for example, to England or France. This marginalization, however, does not diminish the traumatic experience of Italy's invasion and occupation of Ethiopia, which, in *Regina di fiori e di perle*, affects three living generations: Mahlet's elders, Mahlet's parents, and Mahlet herself. Ghermandi explicitly addresses the issue of historical revisionism through her storyteller. Returning to Ethiopia following the death of her favorite elder, Mahlet confesses to her father: "In Italia sono convinti di essere passati di qui in gita turistica e di aver abbellito e ammodernato il nostro paese pidocchioso con strade, case, scuole. Non sai quante volte me lo sono sentito dire [...] Non ho mai risposto perché non sapevo come obiettare." ("In Italy they are all convinced that the Italians came here on a sightseeing trip […] and that they beautified and modernized our lousy country with roads, homes, schools. You can't imagine how many times I had to listen to this version […] I never answered because I did not know how to object.)[79] Mahlet also expresses resentment towards being perceived as foreign, first in Italy and subsequently in Ethiopia, as her style of dress and her behavior mark her as different from her fellow villagers. Disconnected from both languages, cultures, and countries, Mahlet regains a sense of belonging through her actions as compiler and dispenser of familial and regional histories of Ethiopia, which she listens to and then transcribes in writing. As recipient of the stories of her elders, Mahlet finds her voice, conceding that while she did not have the

[78] Jacqueline Andall, Derek Duncan, and Charles Burdette, "Introduction," in Modern Italy 8.1 (2003): 1.
[79] Ghermandi, *Regina,* 198. See Bellesia-Contuzzi and Poletto, *Queen*, 212.

words in Italy, she has since taken ownership of those memories belonging to her community. She states: "Ma oggi so cosa direi. Tutto ciò che hanno costruito lo abbiamo pagato. Anzi, abbiamo pagato anche le costruzioni dei prossimi tre secoli. Con tutti quelli che hanno ammazzato, ne avrebbero di danni da pagare! [...] è passato, ma non tanto da non riparlarne. Bisognerebbe dargli la nostra versione dei fatti." (Today I know what I would say. Everything they built, we paid for. Actually, we have already paid for all the buildings of the next three centuries. Considering the great number of Ethiopians they killed, they owe us a lot of war reparations! […] It is over, but not so over that we should stop talking about it. We should give them our version of the story.)[80] In order to give this story to the Italians, there must be a conversion from oral to written, from individual to communal, and "from there to a communal history."[81]

Mahlet is not born into exile in the Saidian sense; she does not experience the same inherent displacement as Agnant's Emma from the moment of birth. However, storytelling is as integral to her understanding of exile as it is Emma's. Mahlet is an expatriate who struggles with the "solitude and estrangement of exile" while living in Italy.[82] She does not recognize the full extent of Ethiopia's cultural transformation until she participates in collaborative storytelling upon her return; through these exchanges with the elders in her village – who seek her out in part out of a compulsion, a need to know "that their personal identities will [be] heard, understood, and remembered" - she comes to realize the extent of the trauma perpetrated by Italian colonizers.[83] This is the moment in which she experiences a separation from her homeland and from "the self that

[80] Ghermandi, *Regina*, 198. See Bellesia-Contuzzi and Poletto, *Queen*, 212-213.
[81] Sansalvadore, "The uses of 'orality'," 20.
[82] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 181.
[83] Sansalvadore, "The uses of 'orality'," 24.

has been formed in the time preceding the exile."[84] There are certain aspects – details – of the pre-colonial way of life and cultural practices of Ethiopia which she does not have access to and which cannot be articulated because there is no one left to speak of them. The sense of loss that she expresses to her father, the collective 'we,' Ethiopians who are still living and those who have died, is the exile from a traditional homeland that the postcolonial subject experiences. It has also separated Mahlet from the person she was prior to recognizing the extent of this loss. While the imperial project is over, Mahlet states that "è passato, ma non tanto da non riparlarne" (it is over, but not so over that we should stop talking about it).[85] It is through storytelling that Mahlet comes to recognize her own experience in exile – not only in Italy but in Ethiopia as well – and it is through recognition of this loss than she reconnects with her homeland.

Transformative Histories and the Framework of the Sea

Mahlet's return to Ethiopia is not the moment she physically arrives in the country after her time abroad. Her reconciliation with Ethiopia occurs once she has embraced her status as the storyteller, responsible not only for documenting what she has heard but ensuring that these histories are passed on. Emma's return occurs at the end of the novel as she drowns herself in a river outside of the hospital shortly after sharing the story of her enslaved ancestor, Kilima. This suicide is described by Flore as a beginning, not an end, as she informs the hospital staff that Emma's soul has joined the river. Now that the voices, the histories, of her ancestors have been passed on to Flore, Emma is able to "entreprendre le voyage de retour […] Emma me disait souvent qu'elle reprendrait un

[84] Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, 250.
[85] Ghermandi, *Regina*, 198. See Bellesia-Contuzzi and Poletto, *Queen*, 213.

jour la route des grands bateaux pour rejoindre les autres" (make the return trip […] to go back to the route of the big boats and join the others).[86] In this way, both novels conclude by invoking the currents and tides of the sea and of what a 'return journey' implies i.e. circularity, continuation, progression. In *Le Livre d'Emma*, death is structured as a threshold, not an ending, as Flore experiences a vision of Emma in the concluding pages of the novel. She acknowledges this vision, confirming that Emma "n'était pas morte, elle avait rejoint les autres, là-bas" ([she] wasn't dead; she had joined the others, over there).[87] And in the closing lines of Ghermandi's novel, Mahlet states: "gli feci una promessa […] ed è per questo che oggi vi racconto la sua storia. Che poi è anche la mia. ma pure la vostra." (I made a promise […] And so, that is why today I am telling you his story. Which is also my story. But now, yours as well.)[88] As Emma passes on her stories to Flore, Mahlet passes on her stories to us the readers. In Italian, the 'you' is the plural (both formal and informal) 'voi' ("ma pure la vostra"), a gesture that both distances Mahlet from and is inclusive towards the Italian readership. Both novels depict the protagonists' – Emma, Flore, Mahlet - development from recipients to mediators to storytellers, and there is a continuity preserved in their ownership of those words, those voices. Each novel emphasizes mobility as integral to the storytelling tradition, to the circulation of histories, to orality as a form of transmission, and to the transregional spaces of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

Emma physically and spiritually returns to the sea while Mahlet's story travels across the sea – from Ethiopia to Italy, where the novel was published – and is given through direct address to an Italian readership, not only inviting Italian participation in

[86] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 164. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 201.
[87] Agnant, *Le Livre d'Emma*, 165. See Ellis, *The Book of Emma*, 202.
[88] Ghermandi, *Regina*, 251. See Bellesia-Contuzzi and Poletto, *Queen*, 251.

dismantling the national myth of benign colonialism but insisting upon it through the declaration that these stories belong to the reader (and therefore will not be forgotten). In this way the endings are also beginnings which emphasize the circularity of the authors' projects and of the sea which serves as a frame. The passing on of this anthology of voices is one way these women work through both the detachment of exile and the sense of disjointedness which manifests in the alienation and discomfort Emma and Mahlet experience when confronted with the discontinuity of colonial history as it is taught and perpetuated in Europe and North America. The act of interpellating the reader (us) or the listener (Flore) as both storytellers and recipients of these cross-generational histories passed down through family and community members is itself an act of resistance; if the national archive is one that excludes, then the maritime alternative is one that includes. It is this inclusive communal memory that preserves the past in the present and future.

Both *Le Livre d'Emma* and *Regina di fiori e di perle* constitute "born translated" novels, as both storytellers and recipients are engaged in the process of translation, but they may also be considered examples of transnational literature: decentering the nationalist paradigms of French and Italian literary studies, reconfiguring the temporal and locative boundaries of the novel, and "focus[ing] our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders."[89] In recent years, the growth of literary transnationalism beyond American Studies where it originated has often been discussed in conjunction with globalization.[90] To consider these novels at the intersection of transnationalism and the sea is equally productive, and this comparative study redefines what constitutes a border. In contrast to the arbitrary

[89] Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, 1.
[90] Peter Morgan, "Literary transnationalism: A Europeanist's perspective," *Journal of European Studies* 46.1 (2017): 3-20.

delineation of geographical space and "projection of a series of sociopolitical dimensions" on that space which is characteristic of, for example, the colonial encounter, a maritime framework makes no such definitive claim because the border between land and sea is always changing, evolving, and circulating.[91] Even the use of terms such as border or shore*line* fails to reflect the intrinsic fluidity of the spaces where land and sea visibly and repeatedly meet.

The continuous process of space (re)making which characterizes the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas is also at stake for the storytellers in *Le Livre d'Emma* and *Regina di fiori e di perle*. Both novels aim to dismantle the dominant narrative of colonial history and the structural reinforcement of that history in institutional spaces such as universities, courtrooms, and hospitals. Through storytelling, Emma, Flore and Mahlet cultivate both histories and a tradition of preserving history that is defined by its fluidity and its mobility: it is always being reconstituted and recontextualized with each new encounter and perspective, such that the past and the present are not positioned as discrete and fixed periods of time. Instead, these novels can be read as creating – through their foci on communal memory, multiple voices, and border crossing - historical sites of renewal, integration and exchange. There is great potential in this celebration of history as a creative and co-constructive process, inherently subjective and itinerant, which naturally emerges from the Caribbean and the Mediterranean as maritime crossroads.

[91] Quayson, "Periods versus Concepts," 344.

CHAPTER III:

THE INHERITANCE OF EXILE IN GISÈLE PINEAU'S *L'EXIL SELON JULIA* AND ERMINIA DELL'ORO'S *L'ABBANDONO: UNA STORIA ERITREA*

In bringing together Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* and Erminia Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia Eritrea*, this chapter moves towards a nautical framework for the analysis of identity. Identity is dynamic, both constructed and maintained through interactive contexts, and composed not only of traits and characteristics, but social relations and community roles.[1] The fluid, shifting nature of identity has been theorized in the field of postcolonial studies through metaphors of hybridity, mixing, and translation. Much of this work is indebted to Homi Bhabha's Third Space, a transitional in-between space which reveals the ambivalence of postcolonial power relations, where it is possible to disrupt and transform structures of meaning and reference to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves."[2] The liminal Third Space challenges the illusion of historical identity as a "homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People."[3] In the previous chapter, we have seen the way that colonial history is deconstructed through the integration of marginalized voices – previously excluded – into dominant discourse. In this chapter, formations of identity are explored, dismantled, and reconstructed through the experience of *métissage.*

Each of these novels gestures to a determination of identity that is also defined by a breakdown of communication, occurring in the spaces where trauma cannot be

[1] Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, George Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," 69.
[2] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 38.
[3] Homi Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 155.

articulated. This inarticulation is sometimes a result of linguistic, psychological or legal constraints to speaking. Building on the previous discussion of Thiong'o and Achebe in the introduction, this chapter builds on scholarship which has defined, as Kalpana Seshadi does, "the trauma of colonialism as a fundamental expropriation of one's language manifested as the denigration and loss of the mother tongue, a partial or imperfect imposition of an alien tongue, de-legitimization of vernacular discourses and knowledge and variegated forms of censorship."[4] Censorship not only takes the form of oppressive language policies but it is also an integral component of state apparatuses that silence alternatives to mainstream discourse. In these novels, what we might call "parental censorship" is reflected in the relationships between mothers – who either embrace or reject assimilation into the colonizer's culture – and daughters. These constraints – political, familial and social – intersect with the psychological burden of trauma that both Pineau and Dell'Oro grapple with in their texts.

The desire to reconcile trauma and to find closure for adolescents Gisèle and Marianna is linked to their identity formation and their search for a community. The novels explore the (in)accessibility of an interlocuter and the way in which characters compensate for the absence of a sympathetic listener as they work through traumatic experiences in their communal and personal histories. In this chapter, I consider the importance of both constructive encounters and a lack of closure passed down through generations that stems from the colonial period in the formation of identities. Building on previous discussions of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, these novels present fragmented coming of age narratives in the exilic experiences of storytellers Gisèle and Marianna, who negotiate their identities between Guadeloupe and France, Eritrea and Italy. The

[4] Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, "Colonial Trauma and Literary Silence," 67.

characters' coming of age is entwined with the experiences of previous generations, mothers and grandmothers, whose perspectives influence Gisèle and Marianna on their respective journeys. The concept of *métissage* informs both texts, invoking both Édouard Glissant and Françoise Lionnet, as Gisèle and Marianna grapple with the opacity of an unrecorded past, reappropriating histories curated through oral exchange to better understand themselves.[5] It is visible in the circulation of French and Creole between Gisèle and her grandmother, in Marianna's search for her father, whose acknowledgment would afford her the rights of an Italian citizen, and in the mobility of these characters, who come to claim the liminal spaces of 'not belonging' as their own.

In an interview with Florence Raymond Jurney, Pineau describes a correlation between the complexity of characters and of Guadeloupe as a character in her novels. In viewing the history of the island as part of both collective and individual memory, she writes: "on grandit avec ça, on se retrouve avec pas mal de bagages encombrant sur l'identité: qu'est-ce qu'on est? Est-ce qu'il faut tourner la page et oublier? Est-ce qu'on peut?" (We grow up with that, we end up with a lot of baggage encumbering identity: what are we? Should we turn the page and forget? Can we?)[6] Central to the nautical framework of this chapter is this line of questioning, which reflects the larger theme of identities in flux, shifting between possibilities of (dis)engagement and reconciliation with a communal memory and past.

[5] Françoise Lionnet. "Introduction: The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage," *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, 4-5.

[6] Gisèle Pineau. "Entretien avec Gisele Pineau." *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones* 27.2 (2012) : 11. Translation is mine.

The Anxiety of Exile in Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia*

On the first page of his preface to *Caribbean Critique*, Nick Nesbitt cites Gisèle Pineau as an author whose name is synonymous with Francophone Caribbean writing. A contemporary of Agnant, Pineau was born in Paris to Guadeloupean parents who immigrated to France before she was born. Her accolades as an author are prolific, including the 1993 Carbet de la Caraïbe prize for her second novel, *La grande drive des esprits*, and the 1996 Prix RFO du livre for her third novel, *L'espérance-macadam*.[7] Her fourth novel, *L'exil selon Julia*, published in 1996 is both an autobiographical account of Pineau's own childhood and a biographical portrait of her grandmother. In an interview with Nadège Veldwachter, Pineau describes the experience of writing the novel as communal from her earliest conceptualization of the project:

> In *L'exil selon Julia*, I wanted to come back to the story of my family. It was more a question of gathering memories. I questioned my brothers and sisters, who shared many memories with me. In the book, I evoke my grandmother, her trip in metropolitan France, the six years she spent in an apartment with us, and her relationships with others. It is not a novel about nostalgia, a childhood in the Antilles, but instead a desire to speak, ever and always, about relationships between people, prejudices, the human condition.[8]

L'exil selon Julia shares a similar structure to *Regina di fiori e di perle*, in that the framing of the novel is a *Bildungsroman*, depicting the coming-of-age of Gisèle. Gisèle, like Ghermandi's Mahlet, both receives and preserves her family's histories through her dual role as a listener and as a compiler of familial memories. The novel itself weaves

[7] The Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-Monde is an annual literary prize given to the best literary work written in French or French Creole from the Caribbean or the Americas. The prize was inaugurated in 1990 in *Carbet* magazine, The aim of the prize is to promote creole writing and creolization. From 1990-2011, the prize was presided over by Édouard Glissant. In 2011, Patrick Chamoiseau was elected as president of the prize. The Prix RFO du Livre was a French literary prize awarded annually from 1995-2010 by the RFO (television and radio services operating France d'outre mer) to a Francophone work of fiction linked to the overseas departments.

[8] Nadège Veldwachter and Gisèle Pineau. "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau." *Research in African Literatures* 35.1 (2004): 181.

Gisèle's childhood and adolescence with her grandmother's experiences, such that the boundaries of the frame narrative are flexible, and it is Julia's perspective that shapes her granddaughter's maturation and the author's retrospective account of her adolescence. This, too, is a characteristic of the *Bildungsroman*, as Gisèle's contact with political, psychological and sociocultural spheres of her world are humanized and personalized through her interactions with others. These interactions influence her maturation as an individual: principle among these in a constructive capacity is her grandmother. The racialized conflicts Gisèle experiences in France and in Guadeloupe are destructive but equally impactful on her development.[9]

Through these interactions, Gisèle comes to recognize her parents' rejection of Guadeloupe as a conscious choice made to ease the assimilation of their family into France. Julia offers Gisèle the opportunity to reconnect with a history and an identity that has been repressed, allowing her to better understand who she is in relation to others. This relationship speaks to the necessity of communal memory in exile, where community forms an anchor for those otherwise adrift. The dynamic between Gisèle and Julia embodies a larger concern in Caribbean studies. *Éloge de la créolité* establishes that "la mémoire collective est notre urgence. Ce que nous croyons être l'histoire antillaise n'est que l'Histoire de la colonisation" (collective memory is our emergency. What we believe to be Antillean history is just the history of colonization).[10] There is an obligation to acknowledge a collective memory: "l'acceptation de notre créolité nous permettront d'investir *ces zones impénétrables du silence où le cri s'est dilué*" (the acceptance of our

[9] For further explanation of the postcolonial heroine's *Bildung*, see Oluyomi Oduwobi, Harry Sewlall, and emi Abodunrim's "The Postcolonial Female 'Bildung' in Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*," *Journal of Black Studies* 47.5 (2016): 383-401.

[10] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant, *Éloge*, 36-37. Translation is mine.

creolity will allow us to invest these impenetrable zones of silence where the scream has been diluted).[11] One such "zone impénétrable du silence" is slavery, where "le cri" has dissolved under the weight of colonial history. The use of the verb "se diluer" implies the possibility of recovering echoes of the original voice but there is an irretrievable quality to dilution or dissolution. For Pineau, *L'exil selon Julia* is not a story of nostalgia for a childhood in the Antilles (which the author herself did not have, raised in Paris), but this does not preclude the past and its impact on the present. The novel centers on the importance of community, existing within and without, and the desire to speak. Pineau's desire to speak "ever and always" keeps the "zone impénétrable du silence" at bay. The pressure of penetrating the silence surrounding the history of Guadeloupe from a position of exile manifests in *L'exil selon Julia* through strategies of talking around the subject of slavery, of mediating it through a second speaker, and of relying on euphemism, metaphor and simile to fill those gaps where language cannot adequately represent the trauma.

Violence is not confined to the colonial past in *L'exil selon Julia*, illustrating a traumatic resonance that is passed down from the past to the present. Pineau's novel explores trauma as a residual, cyclical echo of the colonial period through the racialized abuse suffered by Julia at the hands of her husband and experienced by Gisèle in school. The French language becomes synonymous with that trauma. At issue in many postcolonial texts is the choice between languages (or the foreclosing of a choice through oppressive educational policies, which is itself a loss) and means of transmission. Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* is written in French but the text grapples with a sense of linguistic displacement that stems from that (lack of) choice and the repression of Creole.

[11] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant, *Éloge*, 38. Translation is mine.

Pineau's novel engages with the dual implication of "naufragée," both in terms of the legacy of slavery and the alienation of existing 'in-between' spaces and languages. While "naufragée" in the context of *Éloge de la créolité* is an adjective, as a noun "naufragé" refers to the person who is shipwrecked, or the castaway. "Naufrage" describes not only a shipwreck but also a figurative collapse, in which something falls apart, and to be cast away from one's "home" in exile is to be severed from one's foundations or the sense of stability which comes from belonging to a particular place.[12] In the first chapter of *L'exil selon Julia*, Pineau describes the titular character's physical voyage by ship and the anxiety that she experiences 'in-between' her native Guadeloupe and the destination, France. Upon arriving in Paris, Julia must acclimate to a life that is not her own, displaced from her home, and her sense of alienation is palpable, not least because of her relationship to the French language.

Julia lives with her son, Maréchal, in Paris for six years, during which time the children become accustomed to her use of Creole and attempt to teach her to write in French. The granddaughter describes these ultimately fruitless efforts, admitting, "Ce qui entre aisément dans une tête dure d'enfant, avance à reculons devant des cheveux blancs. Julia veut apprendre. Elle y met de la bonne volonté. Elle veut croire – comme nous le lui disons – que l'instruction est un canot de sauvetage, un moyen de sortir de la couillonnade." (What readily goes into the hard head of a child goes into reverse faced with white hair. Julia wants to learn. She does her work willingly. She wants to believe – as we tell her – that learning is a lifeboat, a way to get out of ignorance.)[13] Pineau describes the acquisition of literacy skills as a life boat that reaches its destination easily

[12] "Naufrage." *Larousse Pocket Dictionary.* Paris: Larousse, 2007. 225. Print.
[13] Pineau, *L'exil*, 133. All English translations of *L'exil selon Julia* are by Betty Wilson unless otherwise noted. See Gisèle Pineau, *Exile According to Julia*, trans. Betty Wilson, 69.

if the castaway is a child, but turns back when confronted with the white hair of an illiterate adult. Cut off from literacy because of her age, Julia remains linguistically adrift in France, struggling to communicate with those around her and unable to "sortir de la couillonnade." For the children, ignorance is linked to an inability to write in French, demonstrating the internalization of colonial values that privilege French and devalue Creole.

The internalization is an inheritance from their parents. This text treats three generations of exile: that of Julia, whose son forced her to leave Guadeloupe for a better life in France, her son and daughter-in-law, who chose to emigrate, and her grandchildren who were raised in exile. To raise her children in exile, Daisy decides not to teach them Creole because "Pour quoi faire? C'est seulement dans la colère qu'il lui échappe, pour intimer silence, faire taire l'insolence, ou commander patience." (To do what? It is only in anger that he escapes, to intimate silence, to silence insolence, or to command patience.)[14] For Daisy, there is no future in Creole and prior to their grandmother's arrival, the children only heard the language in the context of emotional outbursts. It is only when Daisy cannot control herself that she allows Creole to 'escape' into her Parisian home. French is a civilized language, and to speak French "témoigne de bonne éducation et manières dégrossies" (shows good education and refined manners).[15] This linguistic hierarchy is part of the colonizer's History and it is coupled with the suppression, or erasure, of Creole voices.

In *Éloge de la créolité* orality is characterized as an "expression esthétique" which "recèle un système de contrevaleurs, une contre-culture" but this counter-culture is

[14] Pineau, *L'exil*, 292. Translation is mine.
[15] Pineau, *L'exil*, 292. Translation is mine.

lost with breakdown of the plantation system, destructurings, restructurings, and conversions that encountered assimilation and departmentalization.[16] In this historical moment that shaped Daisy's value judgements on French and Creole, "cette force orale s'est retrouvée tournant à vide, inutile à la promotion sociale, à l'existence citoyenne" (this oral force found itself spinning empty, useless for social advancement, for civic existence).[17] It is only through the adoption of French values and language that people feel they can express themselves and as a result, "l'oralité alors commença son enlisement dans notre inconscient collectif" (orality then began to settle into our collective unconscious).[18] Without access to Creole orality, to this counter-culture, how does one speak back to the French culture which assigned these linguistic values?

For Julia, Creole orality is the dominant mode of expression because she is not assimilated into "une société en pleine dérive identitaire" (a society totally alienated).[19] We are initially under the impression that Julia is unable to choose her language or means of transmission; because she is incapable of learning how to speak or write in French, her only recourse is to communicate orally in Creole. But then Julia reveals to us details of her abusive husband's love letters, written in French while he was away, and how she attempted to learn the alphabet to read for herself these "mots d'amour."[20] When he returned from France, however, his abuse continued as before and she states, "J'ai pas couru sous les coups. Mais j'ai plus cherché à comprendre les écritures. J'ai plu caressé les lettres de France." (I did not run away under the blows. But I no longer sought to

[16] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant. *Éloge*, 34.
[17] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant. *Éloge*, 34. Translation is mine.
[18] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant. *Éloge*, 34. Translation is mine.
[19] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant. *Éloge*, 34. Translation by M.B. Taleb-Khyar. See the bilingual edition of *Éloge de la créolité*, In Praise of Creoleness, trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar, 95.
[20] Pineau, *L'exil*, 135.

understand the writing. I no longer caressed the letters from France.)[21] Julia decides not to try to understand Asdrubel's writing, and she no longer assigns value to "les lettres de France," neither the love letters nor the characters of the alphabet. French writing does not – for Julia – express truth and therefore it cannot be the means through which she tries to express herself.

Because of the disparity between what Asdrubel writes in French and what he says to her, Julia "en gardait une défiance instinctive à l'encontre des écrits. Un bord de sa mémoire refusait de recéler cette comédie de signes" ([she] kept an instinctive mistrust of all that was written. A corner of her memory refused to harbor this farce of signs).[22] She consciously decides against deciphering Asdrubel's letters because she perceives an inherent dishonesty in French writing, and this mistrust is what guards her mind against literacy acquisition. While her age may be a factor, the narrator acknowledges that Julia "*veut* croire" (emphasis mine) that learning to write will deliver her from ignorance. The desire to believe is not the same as believing, and her desire is tempered by her instinctive mistrust of this "comédie de signes," a performative act that does not necessarily correspond to reality. Julia encounters this disparity not only in Asdrubel's writing, but in "des Félicitations de ceci, Grades, Honneurs, Mérite, Reconnaissance de la France à son fils de Guadeloupe" (Congratulations from this one and that one, Rank, Honors, Merit, Gratitude from France to her son from Guadeloupe), commendations engraved on plaques that Asdrubel brings back from his military campaigns.[23] These French military distinctions craft a narrative of Asdrubel as an honorable and heroic soldier which Julia understands to be a lie because she is intimate with his brutality.

[21] Pineau, *L'exil*, 135-136. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 70.
[22] Pineau, *L'exil*, 136. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 71.
[23] Pineau, *L'exil*, 136-137. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 71.

Written French is consistently associated with violence in the text, not only through Asdrubel's letters but in Julia's own education. In trying to teach her to write, the granddaughter describes the breaking of the chalk and moments in which "les mots sur le papier se lèvent pareils à des ombres malfaisantes qu'on jure de terrasser, coûte que coûte" (the words on the paper rise up like malevolent shadows that one swears to strike down at all costs).[24] The impulse to strike down shadows echoes Asdrubel's abuse of Julia. He returns from war in the trenches traumatized, and he brings back "ses revenants, tous ces visages jeunes étonnés dans la mort" (his ghosts, all those young faces astonished in death).[25] Unable to combat the shadows that haunt him from his time in war, Asdrubel uses Julia as the outlet for that rage and frustration. This violence is racialized in the internalized colorism that Asdrubel, as a light-skinned man of color, projects onto the dark-skinned Julia. Julia represents the double-bind that women of color, particularly dark-skinned women of color, experienced both during and after the colonial period. A toxic masculinity – aggression, domination, physical violence – becomes a strategy for resisting colonialization, whereby men of color participate in gendered violence against women of color, lashing out at the most vulnerable "Other" within the colonial framework. If written French is a language of violence cloaked in "belles majuscules, lettres bien tournées dessinées à l'encre violette" (fine capitals, beautifully molded letters, drawn in violet ink), then it is not a language Julia is inclined to use.[26]

It is significant that Julia's exposure to written French is associated with (masculine) violence in *L'exil selon Julia*, and the construction of a reality (in which she

[24] Pineau, *L'exil*, 135. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 70.
[25] Pineau, *L'exil*, 132. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 69.
[26] Pineau, *L'exil*, 137. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 71.

has a loving, affectionate and honorable partner) that does not match Julia's lived experience. It speaks to what Florence Ramond Jurney describes as an "histoire féminine" in the context of Antillean literature, writing that "les personnages féminins ne peuvent pas raconter leur propre histoire que lorsqu'elles parviennent à rétablir un lien à la mère et aux autres femmes de la communauté, ces femmes qui les soutiennent" (female characters cannot tell their own story until they are able to reestablish a bond with the mother and other women in the community, the women who support them).[27] For Gisèle, telling her own story is also the story of her mother and grandmother, and it is Gisèle who demonstrates the way that writing in French can reflect a communal truth while simultaneously critiquing the language as an instrument of oppression, disenfranchisement and erasure.

Pineau breaks up the text periodically with italicized Creole phrases to remind us of Julia's distance from French, of Gisèle's distance from Creole which is foreignized through the visual marker of its difference. This text by Pineau's admission comes from an accumulation of her siblings' memories pieced together by her as an adult; the Creole phrases disrupt the French reading experience but do not dominate the text, signifying perhaps the relative familiarity or comfort that Pineau has with the language (particularly in writing). The narrative point of view changes to account for that linguistic displacement. When the granddaughter narrates the text, her voice is signaled through the use of the first-person "I". Julia, on the other hand, narrates through direct quotation framed by the granddaughter or in third-person "She". This strategy of Pineau's is an effort to demonstrate the distance (or lack thereof) that each character has from French in

[27] Florence Ramond Jurney, *Voix/es libres: maternité et identité féminine dans la littérature antillaise,* 84. Translation is mine.

their respective exiles. As a child of exile, the granddaughter is not only alienated from Creole in France, but from the legacy of slavery in Guadeloupe. The distinguished visitors to the house, "inféodés au seul Français de France, regardent Man Ya sans la voir, avec un brin de compassion" because she embodies, to them, "toutes ces pensées d'esclavage qui leur viennent parfois et qu'ils étouffent et refoulent comme le créole dans leur bouche." (The distinguished visitors to the house, pledged to be French French, look at Man Ya without seeing her, with a touch of compassion because she embodies, to them, all these thoughts of slavery that come to them from time to time and that they stifle and repress like the Creole in their mouths.)[28] Creole is linked to this traumatic past of slavery, both of which are repressed by these educated individuals who consider themselves "redevables à la France" for their superiority to the illiterate and poor citizens of Guadeloupe.[29] They do not claim similar origins to Julia, who is reduced to a representation of everything unpleasant and uncivilized about Guadeloupe and its past, identifying themselves with France. In this narrative, *la Patrie* is characterized a savior, and its role in institutionalizing slavery is erased from History.

Slavery itself is "un mot honni des grandes personnes" (a word banished by grown-ups) and to question adults on the subject "c'est perdre pied dans les grandes eaux de l'Histoire du monde, tour à tour démontée et faussement ensommeillée" ([to question] is to lose your footing in the deep waters of the History of the world, now raging wild, now deceptively sleepy).[30] The "grandes personnes" to which the narrator refers are the adults in Paris, specifically Antillean – if not Guadeloupian – immigrants in France. What Pineau describes in this passage is the instability and anxiety that an individual in

[28] Pineau, *L'exil*, 114-115. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 59.
[29] Pineau, *L'exil*, 115.
[30] Pineau, *L'exil*, 154. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 81.

exile endures. To lose one's footing in the "grandes eaux" of History (with a capital H) is to drown. This metaphor resonates with the perilous image of Antillean histories shipwrecked in colonial History. To be in exile is to be shipwrecked and any disturbance of the water in which a castaway is adrift could cause him or her to sink. In order to protect themselves and their children, the narrator adds that "on nous demande seulement de vivre au jour présent, laisser reposer la lie du passé, ne pas découdre ces sacs miteux où l'on a enfermé la honte et l'humiliation d'être descendants d'esclaves nègres africains" (they ask us only to live in the present-day, to let the dregs of the past lie, and not to cut open the dingy bags where they have shut up the shame and humiliation of being descendants of black African slaves).[31] The adults ask their children to follow their example, to live in the present and not to cut open the bags in which they've buried – at sea - the trauma of this collective memory of slavery. By denying the past, individuals in exile are better able to assimilate into French society. The anxiety inherent in this response to a child's inquiry is linked to a fear of carrying the weight of these "sacs miteux," these histories and voices, which they've tried to dispose of to live in France.

The only individual willing to speak of slavery to the children is Julia, not only because she refuses to assimilate into French culture but also because, for her, slavery is not located in the depths of History. Asdrubel is described as having light eyes and wavy hair, and Julia adds that "quand il venait sur son cheval de géreur, avec son casque colonial blanc, sa chicote à la main… au loin, on aurait dit un Blanc-pays" (when he came on his overseer's horse, with his white colonial helmet, his whip in his hand… from a distance, you would have thought him a local white).[32] Julia draws deliberate

[31] Pineau, *L'exil*, 154. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 81.
[32] Pineau, *L'exil*, 132. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 68.

comparisons between Asdrubel and the white colonial overseer in order to illustrate the way in which their dynamic mirrors that of a master and a slave. Julia describes herself as "un affront, un outrage… son esclave" (an affront, an outrage… his slave) not only because she is "la plus laide des négresses noires" (the ugliest of the darkest black women) selected to spite his father, but also because of the nature of his dehumanizing abuse of her.[33] Julia recounts stories of slavery that she herself has overheard and remarks, to her grandchildren, that the abolition of slavery in 1848 "c'est pas si loin […] juste avant-hier soir, l'autre jour" (that's not so long ago […] just the night before last, just the other day).[34] For her, the past of slavery is still present and accessible to her because, in Guadeloupe, she interacts with those who have memory of those histories and experiences that were never included in French colonial History.

The surrounding sea not only serves as a grave for "les vaisseaux négriers et quantités de vieux os d'esclaves" (slave ships and quantities of old slave bones) but also as an 'in-between' space that Julia and her family cross between Guadeloupe and France.[35] Maréchal insists on bringing his mother to Paris because "partir, la seule réponse à ce martyre" (leaving, the only answer to this martyrdom) that she endures because of Asdrubel.[36] He believes that exile will deliver her from suffering, and together the family boards the transatlantic steamer *Colombie*, a name that evokes the colonial endeavors of Christopher Colombus in the Americas. The journey lasts ten days, and despite "toutes ces longueurs de mer détirées entre elle et lui, Julia garde une inquiétude au cœur et sursaute à tous les bruits de bottes" (all the expanse of sea stretched out

[33] Pineau, *L'exil*, 133. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 69.
[34] Pineau, *L'exil*, 158. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 83.
[35] Pineau, *L'exil*, 61. Translation is mine.
[36] Pineau, *L'exil*, 48. Translation is mine.

between her and him, Julia still has anxiety in her heart and every sound of boots makes her start.)[37] Trapped between Guadeloupe and France, she is still haunted by sounds that remind her of her husband (and what she has left behind). But even the abuse associated with her home is preferable to the sensation she experiences when she disembarks "tout juste en terre d'exil et cinq encablures de chaînes viennent d'être ajoutées à son existence" (in a land of exile and five cable lengths of chains have just been added to her existence) in the forms of her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren.[38] She does not collapse under the burden of familial chains but her obligation to her 'saviors' does burden her while she is in exile.

The title of Pineau's novel centers Julia, not as she is seen through young Gisèle's eyes (it is not *L'exil selon Man Ya*) but as a more fully realized individual evoked in the novel. That Julia's story is also Gisèle's story – and that of her mother, Daisy, and her siblings – emphasizes the community (specifically, community of women) that contributes to the formation of the individual. The Julia of the novel is constructed through her relationships with her family, and Pineau's decision to pair Julia's story with her own coming of age emphasizes that identities are not fixed, and that one is always in the process of 'becoming' through relationships with others (even beyond the scope of the *Bildungsroman*). For this reason, Pineau's novel should be considered a model of the Glissantian "roman du Nous" which constructs 'je' in relation to community, again evoking a communal destiny, or interweaving destinies, as opposed to privileging the individual at the expense of his or her relationships.

One task of *créolité* as a literary movement is "donner à voir les héros

[37] Pineau, *L'exil*, 48. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 23.
[38] Pineau, *L'exil*, 49. See Wilson, *Exile According to Julia*, 23.

insignifiants, les héros anonymes, les oubliés de la Chronique coloniale" (show the insignificant heroes, the anonymous heroes, the forgotten ones of the colonial Chronicle).[39] In doing so, a writer helps to restore true memory to the Antilles by unearthing the histories of men and women "naufragés" in the colonizer's master narrative which dictates victories and losses, linguistically, socially, and politically. The ambivalence of the individual in exile towards the intersection of her past and colonial trauma is a common source of anxiety among Francophone Caribbean texts, and a reflection of the postcolonial condition of des Antilles. The title of Pineau's novel reflects this desire to elevate her grandmother and those like her, women who go unrecognized for the heroism they live every day. And to speak of *créolité* is to speak of *métissage*, which is integral to Pineau's work and to her own identity.

I would like to return to Lionnet's definition of the term as "a site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" as well as an inclusive reading practice.[40] Solidarity initially seems to be a term that is at odds with the undecidable and indeterminate, but Lionnet is deliberately invoking both the singular and the plural of solidarity: it is a unity or cohesion among individuals, it is irreducible and inclusive, and its mutability is also its strength as a tool of resistance. For Pineau, this mutability is both spatial and temporal; she conceives of *métissage* in relation to the women who give birth to *métis* children such as herself. And while she addresses the colonial past through *L'exil selon Julia*, she also emphasizes, "Sure, I have written about people from the past, but

[39] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant. *Éloge*, 40. Translation is mine.
[40] Lionnet, "Introduction," 6.

my characters travel; you meet them over several generations."[41] This is no more clear than in the autobiographical function of this text, as Pineau returns to these women over the course of a lifetime, reconstructing the events of their intersecting pasts in the present. The author's resistance to *planting* her characters on the island of Guadeloupe is paired with her conceptualization of writing as being a fluid process, a desire to approximate that speaking "ever and always" about one's experience. What Pineau describes is aligned with and supports maritime reading of not only her work, but others situated at similar margins.

Meticcio and *Migranti* in Contemporary Italian Literature

Erminia Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* is also a narrative of traveling characters, as it tells the stories of two Eritrean women: Sellass, who falls in love with an Italian man and is later abandoned by him, and Marianna, the mixed-race daughter of Sellass who longs to escape her mother's abuse and claim her Italian heritage. The novel shifts narrative focus from Sellass and Carlo to Marianna as she comes of age, giving the reader perspectives and insights the characters do not have. *Métissage* figures prominently in Dell'Oro's novel as a conceptual space and in terms of essentialist identities propogated by colonial rhetoric and institutional reinforcement of that rhetoric. As Laura Harris notes, *L'abbandono* represents nationhood "in relation to 'meticcio' status [which] simultaneously constructs a narrative of African-ness and Italian-ness in line with xenophobic reactions, one that naturalizes nationality in relation to biological

[41] Nadège Veldwachter and Gisèle Pineau. "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau." *Research in African Literatures* 35.1 (2004): 184.

race, and thus defines hybridity in terms of racial and national essentialism."[42] In order to understand the relevance of *meticcio* to the formation of Sellass' and Marianna's identities, it is important to consider the context from which this essentialism emerges.

In 2013, Cécile Kyenge was appointed Minister for Integration in Democratic Prime Minister Enrico Letta's grand coalition government. Congolese-Italian Kyenge's appointment received considerable media attention due to her becoming Italy's first black cabinet minister. Both her appointment and her political policies which included birthright citizenship for children of immigrants and protection for migrant populations were met with strong resistance from far-right politicians in implicitly and explicitly racist and xenophobic terms. One of Kyenge's most controversial statements took place in 2013 at an public initiative in Padua where she stated: "L'Italia oggi è un paese meticcio dove convivono tante culture e tante persone che provengono da tanti paesi." (Italy today is a mixed country where many cultures and many people from different countries live together.)[43] This description of Italy as *meticcio* – an adjective of the same origin as the French *métis* - destabilizes that notion of Italianness as being definable in terms of race or language.[44] The myth of a national coherence in terms of Italian cultural traditions, Italian language, and Italian bodies has its roots in the nineteenth-century unification of the peninsula. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan's edited volume, *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* explores the racial theories of the nineteenth century in terms of defining the Italian citizen.

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[42] Laura A. Harris, "Hybrid Italians, Diasporic Africans: Who's/Whose *Meticcio*?" *Callaloo* 31.2 (2008): 600.

[43] Citation taken from the following article: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/06/10/immigrazione-kyenge-litalia-e-meticcia-ius-soli-sara-figlio-del-paese-nuovo/621519/. Translation is mine.

[44] The Italian term "meticcio" has negative connotations that are not overtly associated with the French *métis/métissage.* The term "meticcio" has been reclaimed in positive terms by migrant and immigrant rights activists to refer to those of mixed race, but it has also been and continues to be used to refer to dogs ("mongrel", "mutt") and when intended as a slur, means "half-caste" or "half-breed."

Concurrent with Italian unification, a period referred to as the Risorgimento beginning in 1815 and ending in 1871 with the designation of Rome as the capital city of the Kingdom of Italy, land around the Bay of Assab – a port city on the Southern Red Sea coast of Eritrea - was sold to the Rubattino Shipping Company. Italian settlers arrived in 1880 and in 1889, Italy claimed Eritrea as a colony, occupying the city of Asmara. The ideology defining the Italian citizen as white and European was reflected in Mussolini's racial laws in the 1930s which, in addition to denying Italian Jews their rights as citizens also banned interracial relationships between designated Aryan Italians and those who were Other. Italo-Eritrean children were not recognized by the state unless claimed by their Italian parent, who would be subject to sanctions for violating the racial laws. The racial laws intended to not only discourage interracial relationships but also to disavow the number of mixed-race children whose Italian parent declined to claim them. The historical myth of unified Italian identity is predicated on the erasure of the *meticcio/a*. Evoked in anti-immigration rhetoric to capitalize on a fear of Italy losing some innate Italianness, it is dismantled by Kyenge in the 2013 speech. She speaks of a present moment in which what her opponents fear – Italy as *un paese meticcio* – already exists. In truth, the myth was never based on reality. Kyenge's speech marks a moment in contemporary Italian history that captures the ambivalence of how Italy sees itself in relation to the Global South, North-Western Europe and its own colonial history.

Erminia Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* is marketed in the 1991/2006 Einaudi edition as "un romanzo di amori laceranti nell'Africa coloniale."[45] The phrase "amori laceranti" haunts this text in as many ways as there are translations: *laceranti* can be translated as physical violence, i.e. lacerating, tearing, piercing and emotional

[45] Erminia Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea*. Torino: Einaudi, 1991/2006.

suffering, i.e. heartrending, agonizing, excruciating. This twofold sense refers not only to childbirth and physical abuse but to the relationships Sellass and Marianna have to the Italian man who abandoned them, the Italian and Eritrean communities who reject them, and their own relationship, fraught with resentment and alienation. Erminia Dell'Oro was born in Asmara to Italian parents in 1938 and spent the first twenty years of her life living under Italian occupation before moving to Milan to pursue journalism. In some respects, her novel might be read as that of a second-generation immigrant but as noted in Alessandro Luchetti's preface to his interview with the author, Dell'Oro was born into privilege as a (white) Eritrean national with Italian parents.[46] Her grandfather belonged to the first wave of Italian colonists who settled in Eritrea and she acknowledges that she has faced none of the typical problems associated with the second-generation immigrant experience.

It might be argued that Dell'Oro provides an Italian perspective on Italo-Eritrean relations, but I believe that is an oversimplification of her project. *L'abbandono* is, by the author's admission, a biographical novel written about the life of an Italo-Eritrean woman, Marianna, who met Dell'Oro shortly after the publication of her autobiography, *Asmara Addio* in 1988, and requested that she write the story of her family.[47] Marianna had grown up in Asmara at the same time as the author and remembered her, despite the two having never 'met' as children. There are no known interviews with Marianna or any method of contacting her, and the circumstances and content of their exchanges are mediated through Dell'Oro. The novel is purported to conclude with copies of the historical correspondence exchanged between the woman known as Marianna and her

[46] Alessandro Luchetti, "Intervista a Erminia Dell'Oro." *Iperstoria* 6 (2015): 192-208.
[47] According to an interview with Dell'Oro. Alessandro Luchetti, "Intervista a Erminia Dell'Oro." *Iperstoria* 6 (2015): 192-208.

biological father's Italian family, but this information is extratextual. Neither Dell'Oro nor the publisher indicates within the work itself that the letters are real, or that Marianna is based on a historical figure which complicates notions of voice, authenticity and biography.[48]

Dell'Oro's work – like Ghermandi's – forms part of the postcolonial Italian literary canon but the unique context of Italy must be recognized. Postcolonial Italian authors developed out of a very different context than, for example, the Francophone literary traditions of the Caribbean and the Maghreb. Cristina Lombardi-Diop notes:

> Contrary to other postcolonial literary traditions, italophone literature did not develop during colonial times. The lack of state-run schooling system at secondary level in Italy's former colonies of the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia) and Libya has prevented the formation of a postcolonial literary tradition. Unlike their French counterparts, Italian colonial policies were anti-assimilationist and discouraged Italianisation.[49]

This anti-assimilationist policy is reflected in both the racial laws and the *brava gente* national narrative that both erases and reframes the nature of Italy's colonial presence in Africa. The Italian postcolonial literary tradition has been defined in relation to the emergence of migrant literature in the 1990s to the present-day. For this reason, it is challenging to address postcolonial Italian literature without also addressing the concurrent rise of migrant literature.

To better contextualize Dell'Oro's work within Italian and Italophone literature of the 1990s, I would like to address the first-wave migrant literature whose publication coincided with that of *L'abbandono*. Graziella Parati's *Migration Italy* situates this

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[48] The veracity of the letters is discussed in Erica L. Johnson's *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras, and Erminia Dell'Oro*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2003.

[49] Poddar, Prem, Rajeev S. Patke, and Lars Jensen, *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and Its Empires*, 293.

literature within global and national contexts, including the Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the end of the Eritrean War for Independence (1961-1991), during which time Italy came to symbolize a gateway into Western Europe.[50] The result was an upswing in immigration. To respond to immigration concerns, particularly in response to the influx of African immigrants in Italy, a series of laws were passed in the late 80s to early 90s[51] - the *sanatorie* – to regulate the process through the introduction of *permessi di soggiorno* (permission to stay) and *fogli di via* (deportation orders).

As Parati notes, the language in and around the introduction of the *sanatorie* laws concerns the health of the nation, "based on the assumption that becoming a country of immigrants involves a contamination of the body of the country; the sanatoria laws are 'designed to heal' the country."[52] The rhetoric of immigrants as a disease can't help but evoke for a contemporary reader the essay series published recently in *Near Futures Online*, the New Keywords Collective writes, "the very terms '*migrant* crisis' and '*refugee* crisis' tend to personalize 'crisis' and relocate 'crisis' in the body and person of the figurative migrant/refugee, as if s/he is the carrier of a disease called 'crisis,' and thus carries the contagion of 'crisis' wherever s/he may go."[53] The insidious consequence of terms such as "migrant crisis" or "refugee crisis" as described here is the way in which it places the burden of responsibility on the most vulnerable populations while

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[50] "Interpreted as minor literature, intended in a Deleuzian sense, migrants' literature appropriates a major language, Italian in this case, and turns it into a new system of signification that describes complex lives grounded in cultural displacement […] At times Italy becomes a chosen destination in migration in order to interrupt the linear connections between a former colony and a 'mother'-land." See Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, 13. The question of "minor language/minor literature" is complex when applied to the Italian context, both in terms of Italian colonial history and international perspectives of Italian language and literature.

[51] Foschi (1986), Martelli (1989/90), Turco-Napolitano Law (1998), Bossi-Fini Law (2002).

[52] Parati, *Migration Italy*, 119.

[53] In this moment, it is impossible to speak of bodies circulating in the Mediterranean Sea without addressing the 2013 shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa and subsequent reports of capsized vessels and unconfirmed death tolls.

simultaneously denying those populations the right to tell their own stories.

Clothilde Barbarulli, author of *Scrittrici Migranti*, proposes that migrant literature is provocative precisely because it uses the hegemonic language to create a space for itself, claiming the language and demonstrating the way that it resonates with origins outside of (for example) Italy.[54] While Italian is a hegemonic language and literature of migration published in Italian provokes similar anxieties of linguistic and cultural difference, the singular subjectivity of first-wave Italian migrant literature is complicated by the presence of the native speaker as mediator. Marketability and appeal inform the relationship between linguistic negotiation and power in this presentation and in these texts. In the 1990s, Pap Khouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti* marks the advent of 'migrant literature' in Italy. Khouma, a Senegalese immigrant, is a native speaker of French and of Wolof who chooses to write his autobiography in Italian, negotiating between the colonial heritage which informs his French education and Italian as an elective language. This practice of using Italian as a means of both mediating and rupturing the colonizer-colonized relationship is common in Italian/Italophone migrant literature.

This does not characterize all Italophone literature, certainly not *Regina di fiori e di perle* or *L'abbandono* which are texts centered on the effects of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia and Eritrea respectively. In the context of Khouma's publication, however, Italian has a minor status in relation to the former French colony of Senegal, allowing the author to distance himself from a French linguistic and literary tradition with which he has a very fraught relationship. Khouma's *Io venditore di elefanti* is considered a seminal

[54] Clothilde Barbarulli, *Scrittrici migranti: La Lingua, Il Caos, Una Stella*, 22-23. "Nell'unicità di ciascuna esperienza, le scritture migranti mettono in crisi ogni forma dirassicurazione: non solo usano la langua egemonica per dire sé a contatto con la differenza, ma si pongono come soggetività singolari [...] [C]ercano d'impossessarsi di quella lingua, la perturbano e la fanno risuonare con tracce della loro origine."

text of "first wave" migration literature, published in the 1990s. "First wave" refers to autobiographical narratives typically written by men and mediated through a native speaker/journalist. For *Io, venditore di elefanti* Oreste Pivetta is the mediator, editor, and facilitator who transcribed and prepared the story for publication. The result of this collaboration was a text that captured the mass migration(s) into Italy in the 1980s and 1990s in a new way, rendering legible the migrant experience to an Italian audience. In his introduction to *Io, venditore di elefanti*, Oreste Pivetta concludes that "la nostra società è divisa. Forse più divisa di un tempo: non solo ricchi e poveri, divisa anche per lingue e religioni."[55] He creates an opposition between the tension of economic, linguistic, and religious intersections and the desire to "ricostruire la comunità globale" which emerged out of the postwar period following WWII.[56] Italy is conceived here as existing on the margins of Europe both in terms of its peninsular shape and its Southern orientation.

The paradox here is that - despite Italy's gesture toward recognition of migrant narratives via the institutionalization of publishing houses like Eks&Tra, which, in the 1990s, launched the first annual competition for migrant writers (it is an award that Khouma won), and despite the journalist-translator's claim that the publication of this work is indicative of a desire to "reconstruct the global community" after the devastation of WWII – the validity of the migrant's narrative is constituted by its legibility to Italian readers and its conformity to the Italian literary-journalistic tradition. Linguistic gatekeeping characterizes publishing houses in the 1990s, whereby the collaboration with a native Italian speaker gives the narrative its validity. The nature of this path to

[55] Oreste Pivetta, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, 9.
[56] Pivetta, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, 9.

publication demands that a reader look critically at what it means to be a member, reader, writer of the global community, and the types of narratives that are circulated within the transnational scope of world literature.

By virtue of this significant intervention and standardization of the grammar, it becomes both easier and more difficult to translate because the translator must grapple with the question of *whose voice? What origin/source?* In one sense, the question of origin is one that plagues world literature, in that what we read is always in transit, unstable, re-rooted, read out of time and out of place. But in this particular context, there is also a very practical concern in that neither the translator nor the reader has access to what we might call an "original" text or draft that existed prior to the collaboration. This instability, this problem of origin, is both unique to the Italian context and a characteristic of world literature more broadly.

Khouma's work, while a best-seller in Italy, gained more traction in the world literary market following the publication of its English translation. *Io, venditore di elefanti* was translated through an American academic press - Indiana University Press – and its publication was part of a broader pattern of increased interest in English-language translations of narratives of migration published in Italian in the past ten years. Both *I was an elephant salesman* and the English translation of Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* (*Queen of Flowers and Pearls*) were published by Indiana University Press as part of their Global African Voices series.[57] These texts are read alongside Mongo Beti's

[57] The Global African Voices series as defined per its website: "Global African Voices publishes the wealth and richness of literature by African authors and authors of African descent in English translation. The series focuses primarily on translations of new works but seeks to reissue longstanding classics that are currently out-of-print or have yet to reach English-speaking readers. Novels, novellas, collections of plays, collections of short stories, collections of folktales, and contemplative essays are considered. Works for translation are selected for their broad appeal to English-speaking readers. They may include, but are not limited to, works that deal with culture, social and political issues, human

Cruel City and Abdourahman Waberi's *Transit* and *Harvest of Skulls.*

The Global African Voices series is one way to identify these texts, to render them recognizable to world literature, and in doing so it removes them from 'Italian literature.' The authors' identities are abstracted from national literatures in order to better represent the scope of 'global' but the locative emphasis is on Africa, on the origin culture – Senegal, Somalia, Ethiopia – which fails to encompass the transnational nature of these works, and the way in which the Italian language extends beyond a national linguistic tradition. It also erases the collaborative circumstances that produced Khouma's autobiography, as well as the deliberate instrumentalization of the Italian language as a means by which French-speaking immigrants tell their stories. Beyond the scope of this project, the framing of Italian migrant literature under the Global African Voices series illustrates a larger issue in world literature with regards to how origin is not only understood but marketed to and circulated within a readership.

Mediating the Meticcia Experience in Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea*

Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono* is not a collaborative autobiographical project in the style of Khouma and Pivetta's *Io, venditore di elefanti*, in part because the historical Marianna was not involved in the process of writing the novel, it was not marketed as a biography, and it is unclear how much of the text is fictionalized. But the novel was released one year after Khouma's autobiography which, combined with the success of her autobiographical account of growing up in Eritrea, suggests the publication of *L'abbandono* spoke to growing interest on the part of Italian publishing houses in

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rights, ethnic conflict, health care, democratization, immigration, exile, the Diasporic experience, and other salient concerns of the global African community."

literature of migration in the 1990s, specifically those narratives mediated through Italian voices. Dell'Oro capitalizes on her privilege as someone of means and mobility in her political activism, journalism, and novels to raise awareness of Italy's national narrative *as a narrative*, misrepresenting the consequences of its colonial presence in Africa. She dedicated *L'abbandono*'s publication "al populo eritreo libero" ("to the free Eritrean people") and has spoken openly about her frequent returns to Eritrea in her capacity as a journalist despite being now based in Milan.

L'abbandono is the only novel included in this project that does not employ an in-text framing through storytelling. As Johnson notes, "Dell'Oro participates in the project of recouping oral histories insofar as she tells a story which, on an allegorical level, draws her readers' attention to a narrative of global proportions."[58] This narrative is that of the forgotten families of European colonizers, the abandoned women they've had relations with and the children they've fathered. The narrative shifts from the perspectives of Sellass and Carlo in the first half of the novel (through alternating chapters presented chronologically), then to their daughter, Marianna, in the second half. There are characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* in Dell'Oro's illustration of Marianna's coming of age in Eritrea and the complicated relationship she has with her mother. This text offers a compelling portrait of linguistic, cultural and racial *métissage* and the experience of being born into exile in the Italo-Eritrean context and, like the other texts selected for this project, it reimagines preestablished constructions of reality and explores the transference of cultural knowledge cross-generationally. This novel also engages with the limitations of storytelling and community, and the way in which one can exist both

[58] Erica L. Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Dumas, and Erminia Dell'Oro*, 211.

within and without.

> The novel opens with a myth describing the origin of the rainbow:[59]
>
> > L'universo, accendendo i suoi soli e le stelle negli spazi infiniti, vibrò per l'incanto che gli era toccato, ma capì che era solo, e per sempre. Fu allora che pianse. Un volo d'angeli attraverso i cieli illuminati dai molteplici soli, le ali screziate brillarono riflettendo la luce e disparvero; in quell'attimo l'universo si distese in un ampio respiro, le sue lacrime si cristallizzarono in altri mondi che serbarono il sogno, o il ricordo, delle ali illuminate dai soli. E a volte, a ricordare l'antico dolore del cosmo e quella scia di colori che lo aveva sfiorato per lenirne la pena, appariva nei cieli un arcobaleno.
> >
> > (The universe, turning on its suns and stars in infinite spaces, vibrated with the enchantment that had touched it, but understood that it was alone, and always would be. It was then that it cried. A flight of angels crossed the skies illuminated by multiple suns, the mottled wings shone reflecting the light and disappeared; in that moment the universe stretched out in a wide breath, its tears crystallized in other worlds that held the dream, or the memory, of the wings illuminated by the sun. And sometimes, to remember the ancient pain of the cosmos and that trail of colors that had touched it to soothe its pain, a rainbow appeared in the skies.[60]

It is the sight of the rainbow above her impoverished village in the Eritrean highlands that urges twelve-year-old Sellass to leave for the town of Massaua, a port city on the coast of the Red Sea. Contextualized within this myth is joy associated with both freedom and community as represented by the flight of the angels, and these desires are mirrored in the characters who embark on journeys to and across the sea. Although Sellass herself is not the storyteller, the omniscient narrator integrates the significance of storytelling into this biographical account, from the origin of existence (the myth of the universe and the rainbow) to the tales of Aunt Alefesc: "Evocava gli spiriti dell'aria riempendo le sore

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[59] See Viney Kirpal's "What is the Third World Novel?" which identifies five features of the 'Third World novel': "1) the loose, circular, episodic, loop-like narrative technique; 2) the plotlessness of these novels from a Western point of view; 3) the use of language that is regional, ritualistic, proverbial, metaphoric, and therefore quite distinct from language in the English novel, for example; 4) the use of myths by Third World novelists not just as structuring devices, but as 'value-endowed paradigms' of reality; 5) 'illustrational' or 'archetypal' rather than 'representational' characterization" (cited in Ponzanesi, "Floating Myths", p. 94).

[60] Erminia Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono*, 3. Translation is mine. All subsequent translations of *L'abbandono* are mine unless otherwise noted.

della sera di magiche figure; parlava con le voci dei defunti, ora era un Vecchio e ora una bambina, e Sellass si perdeva in questi incanti." (She evoked the spirits of the air and filedl the evening hours with magical figures; she spoke in the voices of the dead, first as an old man and then a little girl, and Sellass lost herself in these stories.)[61] In Sellass' difficult journey from her home in Adi Ugri to the sea, she is guided by these internalized stories of her community which keep her company and give her strength.

Sellass sees no future for herself in her village. As such, Massaua is described in contrast to the hopelessness she has left behind. Descriptions of the white city are framed ("su un blocco di madreperla che emergeva dal mare") by the sea, vast and characterized by its shifting colors.[62] This description has a mythical quality, imagining the foundations of the city emerging from the water as if destined to be Massaua. The city's long history as a significant port in the Red Sea is acknowledged here; it was also an important site for Italian colonization, serving as the capital of the empire until 1897 (when Asmara was named the capital city).[63] The sea figures in the novel both as a physical space – the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea – and as a lure, promising freedom and possibility. Upon arriving in Massaua, Sellass dreams of her seduction by the sea: "Sellass Sellass, - le sussurrava il mare sciogliendole i capelli, togliendole la lunga veste bianca, sfilandole i bracciali; - Sellass Sellass, - e il nome, come un'eco, vagava negli abissi, e l'acqua era sul corpo una carezza." ("Sellass Sellass," the sea whispered, loosening her hair, taking off her long white robe, pulling off her bracelets; "Sellass Sellass," and the name, like an

[61] Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono,* 4.
[62] "on a block of mother of pearl that emerged from the sea." Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono*, 10.
[63] Massaua has the oldest recorded mosque in Africa, *Masjid aṣ-Ṣaḥābah*. It was also known as a significant site for Venetian merchants in the 15th century and for the Arab slave trade in the 19th and 20th century. Ethiopian slaves were transported to the Arabian peninsula via trade routes from the Ethiopian Highlands which led to Massaua via the city of Adwa. See *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. William Gervase. London, 1989.

echo, wandered in the abyss, and the water was a caress on the body.)[64] Dell'Oro conveys in this passage the way in which Sellass' name, when uttered aloud, has a similar rhythm and sound to the waves washing up on the beach, such that one could imagine hearing the water coming in on the first utterance and going out on the second utterance. The allure of the sea becomes more sexualized as she dreams that the sea strips her of her white clothing and her golden bracelets, leaving her with nothing. The dream ends with Sellass experiencing "un profondo languore" (a profound languor) and realizing, too late, that her body is dissolving. She becomes a part of the sea and then, when she attempts to whisper her own name to the shoreline, she is ignored. She no longer has any power to assert her identity separate from the sea to which she now belongs, nor is she capable of breaking free of the ebb and flow of the waves that bring her to the shore and pull her back out to sea.

In the context of the novel, the dream is interpreted as a prophecy: the sea represents Carlo, the blue-eyed "uomo della sua vita," who will come into her life, seduce and consume her. She gives birth to two children, Marianna and Gianfranco, and with the stringent enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws in the colonies, Carlo proposes the family leave. He promises Sellass that he has made arrangements, but in fact he abandons the family. This abandonment, referred to in the title of the work, coincides with the start of World War II. Sellass' sense of self is dominated by her sexual relationship with Carlo, and this loss of identity is reinforced long after his disappearance as she is scorned by members of her community for her children who bear Italian names and appear to be mixed-race. Sellass' identity is shaped by her community's repeated rejection, and this alienation reduces her to a stagnant figure whose self-loathing is channeled into abusive

[64] Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono,* 22.

behavior towards her daughter. Although the omniscient narrator informs the reader as to Carlo's fate, Sellass and her children never learn the truth. This discrepancy between the narrator/reader's awareness and the characters' awareness is an attempt, according to Sandra Ponzanesi, on Dell'Oro's part to "portray the colonial encounter in which the Italian and African worlds did not really meet, or communicate, but only intersected," leaving the local women to bear the financial, psychological and social burden of having *métisse* children.[65]

Sellass' prophetic dream evokes folkloric images of women and the sea, the most evident being the Siren for whom seduction always results in either the death or enslavement of the enchanted human. The Siren in Sellass' dream is masculine, not only per the subsequent interpretation of the dream but also in the gender of the Italian language (in contrast to French where *la mer* is feminine, in Italian *il mare* is masculine). Framing Carlo as a male Siren who takes no responsibility for the suffering that he inflicts on the woman he seduces is the critique Ponzanesi refers to regarding the colonial encounter. It is also significant that Carlo is repeatedly associated with the sea, the means by which Italian settlers arrived in Eritrea. The sea, while representative of a potential freedom in some capacity, also brings the European colonizer into the country. Sellass' fate in the context of the dream is to echo the sound of her own name, her voice subsumed within the sound of the waves, reminiscent of Echo's fate, recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The myth of Echo and Narcissus is the story of a nymph who wastes away out of love for a man who only sees himself, and this narrative resonates in *L'abbandono* and in Sellass' inability to come to terms with Carlo's betrayal of her. The

[65] Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora*, 146.

prophecy pertains to her relationship with Carlo but does not incorporate her children in any capacity, and this exclusion reflects the extent to which Sellass is consumed by her abandonment. In a negative reading of circulating waters, Sellass is trapped within a cyclical grief and resentment that lasts the rest of her life, to the detriment of Marianna and Gianfranco.

Marianna and Gianfranco are isolated growing up, referred to by the rest of their community as bastards and a source of shame to their mother. Marianna's existence and that of her brother is a reminder to those around her of the Italian colonial presence in Eritrea. It is through this chronic denunciation that Marianna comes to recognize *meticcio* as a slur. Sellass forbids her children from leaving the house in order to avoid future incidents, and it is Marianna who bears the brunt of her mother's disapproval, manifesting in a repeated mantra not to humiliate her. Sellass targets Marianna not only because she is the eldest but because she is a girl, emphasizing the gendered allocation of shame and the way it is used to restrict the mobility of women. This restriction of the adolescent female body is perpetuated by Sellass, who in punishing Marianna is also punishing an extension of herself, the free-spirited and creative girl she was prior to meeting Carlo. Marianna's refusal to accept her marginalized position in Eritrean society (where she says she has no future, in an echo of Sellass' own motivation for leaving her village in the Highlands) manifests through her "need to be outdoors, explore space, and expand her territory to Italy."[66] Marianna eagerly enrolls in school and attempts to claim Italian citizenship through her father. This attempt is sabotaged by her mother who destroys her daughter's birth certificate, leading her to claim the name of her brother's employer instead.

[66] Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes*, 151.

Marianna, as Ponzanesi notes, “search[es] for a name of her own, instrumentalizing the patriarchal authority of a man she hardly knows [to] creat[e] a mythical link between herself and Italy.”[67] Marianna’s engineering of her own Italian identity through a name she chooses (instead of inheriting) is also a subversion of the law, revealing the ineffectiveness of bureaucracy in the construction or maintenance of borders (that which bars or permits someone to claim Italian citizenship). It is furthermore significant that she writes herself into existence, choosing to do so in a language that has historically erased children like her (through the implementation of fascist era racial laws). She asserts her right to Italy and to the plurality of her heritage, choosing to claim it by leaving Eritrea. Marianna announces this intention to her mother towards the end of the novel:

> C’era un silenzio opprimente, Marianna cercava parole per rompere quell disagio:
> - Sono brave gente, - disse, - metterò via dei soldi poi andrò in Italia. Voglio andarmene.
> Sellass si fermò, si appoggiò contro il muro di una vecchia casa, guardò sua figlia.
> - Bene. – mormorò, - se è questo che vuoi. Andare in...
> Non terminò la frase, quell’ultima parola divenne soltanto un respiro.
> -Io non voglio rimanere qua, in questo paese, - disse Marianna.
> -è il tuo paese, - disse sempre sottovoce Sellass.
> La ragazza strinse piú forte il lembo dell’abito. – No, - rispose con calma, - non è il mio paese. Io andrò in Italia.
>
> (There was an oppressive silence, Marianna was looking for words to break that unease: "They're good people," she said, "I'll put some money away and then I'll go to Italy. I want to leave.”
> Sellass stopped, leaned against the wall of an old house, looked at her daughter.
> “Well,” she murmured, “If that's what you want. “Go to...”
> The sentence did not end, that last word became only a breath.
> "I don't want to stay here in this country," said Marianna.
> "It's your country," Sellass said, still in a low voice.
> The girl clutched the edge of her dress more tightly. "No," she replied calmly, "it's not my country. I will go to Italy.”)[68]

[67] Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes*, 152.
[68] Dell’Oro, *L’abbandono.* 253.

Marianna's firm denial that Eritrea is her country is the closest she comes to describing her inheritance of exile, her rejection of a unified national identity. Her entire life has been shaped by the rift of *métissage*, which suspends her between Eritrea and Italy. Marianna refers to her potential employers as *brava gente*, referring to the post-war historical revisionism in Italy that represented Italians as benevolent, both in terms of resistance to the Germans and as "good" colonizers. It implies that perhaps Marianna will confront the same revisionism (as, for example, Ghermandi's Mahlet did) in Italy, but she has already demonstrated her willingness and capacity to advocate for herself. There is no reason to think she would not be able to resist any attempts to 'write over' her experience. In response to her daughter's declaration, Sellass is not even capable of uttering the word 'Italy' and when offered the opportunity to relocate to Italy for work herself, she insists that she will die in her own country.[69] The final chapter of the novel returns to Sellass' point of view after her daughter has crossed the Mediterranean to Italy, giving the reader no insight in Marianna's life abroad. Thus, the triumph for Marianna is not Italy itself but rather a mobility gained through language (a surname) which enables her to move across the sea.

The Nautical Frameworks in Pineau and Dell'Oro

The comparison of *L'exil selon Julia* and *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* gestures towards a self-acceptance that occurs in the transitional space of 'not belonging.' This space manifests in Pineau's work following the departure of Gisèle's grandmother. Gisèle's access to Guadeloupe as it is mediated through Man Ya allows her to create, as

[69] Dell'Oro, *L'abbandono*, 258.

Sylvie Durmelat describes, "ce 'pays pas natal' depuis l'hexagone."[70] The construction of this "pays pas natal" continues after Julia's departure through Gisèle's gardening, whereby she recreates a microcosm of the island in France.[71] Gisèle curates a relationship with Guadeloupe that is not integrated, but embedded within France through the garden, and yet its constructedness – its 'not belonging', not naturally occurring – is the reason for its existence. Gisèle creates other opportunities to connect to Guadeloupe on her own terms through the letters she addresses to her grandmother following the latter's departure. The correspondence is never sent to Julia, but the epistolary framing of these diary entries allows Gisèle to grapple with daily interactions she has with others within a communal context, as she recounts these episodes to an imagined recipient. The veneer of the letters creates a possibility of exchange, of locating a sympathetic interlocuter who will validate Gisèle's personal reflections. In fact, Gisèle is reproducing and sustaining this community within herself, reflecting a (sub)conscious recognition of her own disjointed, or pluralized, identities. The garden and the undelivered letters, both carrying the possibility of renewal, repetition and growth, can be read as empowering for Gisèle, who comes to embrace her own potential mobility, and the opportunity to continue redefining her 'in betweenness' as she moves through the world.

Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* integrates the narratives of Sellass, Carlo, and Marianna into the same novel, a curation of histories by an omniscient storyteller – or implied author – who has access to the perspectives of each character and yet maintains a narrative distance from the events. This narrative distance allows the novel to function both as an individual and a collective account of events, reiterating the

[70] Sylvie Durmelat, "Récit d'un 'Retour au Pays Pas Natal' : Jardins et Migrations dans *L'exil selon Julia* de Gisèle Pineau." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 4.2 (2006): 167.
[71] Durmelat, "Jardins et Migrations," 167.

consequences of the colonial era as both personal and communal. These multiple points of view intersect but do not overlap which represents the challenge of articulating an identity without the social context or communal space to reinforce it. It emphasizes the fragility of self-concept and offers two possibilities. There is Sellass, who is constrained by her fixation on a specific moment in history, as evidenced by the repetition of the phrase, "Ma come ha potuto?" ("But how could he?") throughout the novel. This refrain carries through the chapters of both mother and daughter, revealing that Sellass is trapped within the unresolved trauma of her abandonment. In contrast, Marianna resists all attempts to confine her movements and restrict her access to social spaces and interactional contexts.

For Marianna, the dysfunctional relationship she shares with her mother, Sellass, motivates her to seek out alternative formations of community and self. She, like Gisèle, forges her own connection between Eritrea and Italy that exists outside of the preexisting borders between these spaces, as she claims an alternative 'belonging' to her birthright, fictionalized to grant her access to Italy. Marianna, like Gisèle, also writes a letter that does not reach an intended recipient: addressing the letter to Carlo, she requests that he write to her mother in order to give Sellass closure. A response to the letter is also included in the book, revealing that Carlo died the year before in South Africa. Despite Marianna's efforts, the possibility of resolution between her parents is foreclosed, reflecting both an individual and a communal lack of closure for postcolonial Eritrea. Although Marianna is incapable of healing this rift, she offers an alternative way of working through that breakdown in communication: a self-acceptance and self-concept that incorporates ruptured histories and irresolution as aspects of a journey in progress.

CHAPTER IV:

LANGUAGE AS A MARITIME FRAME: CIRCULATION AND BORDER CROSSING IN *L'AMOUR, LA FANTASIA, DHĀKIRAT AL-JASAD,* AND *HĀRITH AL-MIYĀH*

In this chapter, I consider linguistic disruption and exchange in the novels of Algerian authors Assia Djebar and Aḥlām Mustaghānamī, and Lebanese author Huda Barakāt. Beyond the geography that situates Algeria and Lebanon along the Mediterranean, as well as the historical relevance of the sea to Algiers and Beirut, I read the exchange of languages, dialects, and registers in Djebar, Mustaghānamī, and Barakāt through a maritime lens. Shifting the focus away from urban spaces, I argue that the itinerant negotiation between and blending of linguistic resources in these novels – and throughout the Mediterranean - reflects a formal and stylistic invocation of the sea. This chapter begins with a comparative analysis of Algeria's multilingualism through Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghānamī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, before turning to Lebanon in Barakāt's *Ḥārith al-miyāh*.

Djebar and Mustaghānamī offer two modes for grappling with a critical question facing contemporary Algerian authors: namely, as Réda Bensmaïa queries, "How can we live within several languages and write in only one?"[1] Other scholars have explored this question in depth, informing my own intervention into Algeria's linguistic situation and literary traditions. For example, Anne-Emmanuelle Berger's *Algeria in Others' Languages* engages with the linguistic divisions between French, Arabic and dialects of Tamazight and offers a historical account of the linguistic conflicts of the 1990s.

[1] Réda Bensmaïa, *Experimental Nations, Or, The Invention of the Maghreb*, Trans. Alyson Waters, 15.

Abdelfattah Kilito's *La langue d'Adam* gestures towards bringing these languages together within a context that is both multilingual and metrolingual. The focus is not on the coexistence of discrete languages but on the circulation of those languages.

In thinking through linguistic negotiation in terms of the sea, my work is also indebted to theories of multilingualism and translanguaging. Projects such as Natalie Edwards' *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women: Translingual Selves* and Yasser Elhariry's work on poetic alternatives and translingual divergence in the Mediterranean celebrate, as the latter states, "literature as the long story of authors who brush against one another's spatial and temporal thresholds" through language.[2] This reconciliatory and autonomous description of Mediterranean literature speaks to ongoing conversations about the linguistic processes and interactions that create multilingual spaces. To refocus on the Maghreb specifically, several studies have highlighted translanguaging – that is, the simultaneous use of multiple languages within an integrated communication system – in the context of educational systems of Morocco and Algeria.[3] The growing interest in framing Algeria as a translingual space in both literary and linguistic spheres resonates with the purpose of this chapter, which aims to move away from the binary opposition between Arabic and French to investigate moments of linguistic collusion.

Both Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghānamī's *Dhākirat al-jasad* are multilingual texts in which language creates circulating, intersecting narrative frames. This creates a dual sense of reading, speaking and writing in flux. In one sense, the

[2] Yasser Elhariry, "In 3/4, a trembling question: Mediterranean Literature?" *Contemporary French Civilization* 42.1 (2017): 79.

[3] See, for example, Adil Moustaoui Srhir, Gabriela Prego Vazquez, Luz Zas Varela. "Translingual Practices and Reconstruction of Identities in Maghrebi Students in Galicia." *Languages* 4(3): 2019.

writer, the recipient, and the reader's roles are unfixed to reflect the nature of language as a living, evolving method of communication and of Algeria (we might say more broadly, the Maghreb) as a multilingual site. In another sense, *flux* is synonymous with *resistance* as its inherent mutability poses a threat to the borders of canonical cultural memory.

Mother/Stepmother Tongues: The Reclamation and Limitations of French in Assia Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia*

Djebar uses language to rewrite the French national archive by incorporating documentation of the voices left buried, untranslated, and unwritten. The interruption of French with unannotated Arabic reframes the relationship between France and Algeria, disrupting the monolingual francophone reader's experience. The foreignizing of French which occurs in *L'amour, la fantasia* does not seem to be motivated by the desire to alienate the reader (although linguistic alienation is a concern of Djebar's) but rather a challenge to the notion of "only one" language, that there exists a pure French language, uncontaminated by contact with others. *L'amour, la fantasia* as a text "challenges not only the linguistic borders of reading communities, but the presumed sovereignty of national literature and the stability of language itself."[4] Such challenges pose a doubled threat to the national archive and the hegemony of French.

An archive is a frame through which one accesses a cultivated, pared-down narrative of historical events for a specific target audience. In constructing her own archive, Djebar chooses which documents to engage with and she dismantles the colonial French frame, manipulating the languages of French and Arabic, and inserting her own

[4] Michael Allan, "Scattered Letters: Translingual Poetics in Assia Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia,*" *Philological Encounters* 2 (2017): 180-198.

commentary and inquiries to create a new one. The narrator herself recognizes this when she exclaims, "Chérifa! Je désirais recréer ta course: dans le champ isolé, l'arbre se dresse tragiquement devant toi qui crains les chacals. Tu traverses ensuite les villages, entre des gardes…" (I wanted to recreate your race: in the isolated field, the tree stands tragically in front of you who fear the jackals. You then cross the villages, between guards…)[5] Djebar invokes the revolutionary figure of Chérifa, whose voice is captured by the author's French language, and in "recreating" this woman's movements she demonstrates the way that history is constituted by the form the archivist gives it. Djebar's work models a way of not only reconstituting, but also revealing, the *incompleteness* of canonical cultural memory. The disinterment of Algerian voices and experiences characterizes the movements of the *fantasia* and this continual unearthing of truths, both individual and communal, creates a fluctuating contact between histories, each of which intervenes in the state-sanctioned account of events.

In destabilizing the archive, Djebar is also invested in destabilizing the French language by introducing linguistic collusions with Arabic that subvert the history of linguistic repression in Algeria during and following the colonial era. Throughout the period of French colonial rule in Algeria from 1830 to 1962, "Arabic was effectively marginalized by the predominance of French as the language of official and cultural discourse."[6] One legacy of Algeria's colonial history is the number of bilingual or

[5] Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la fantasia*, 142. All translations from *L'amour, la fantasia* are mine unless otherwise noted.

[6] Debbie Cox, *Politics, Language, and Gender in the Arabic Algerian Novel*, 1. As Cox elaborates in her book, prior to French occupation, education in Algeria was organized around mosques with the aim of enabling pupils to read the Qur'an, to understand Islamic teachings, and to practice Islamic law. The French education system institutionalized in Algeria neglected to teach Literary Arabic while French law replaced Muslim law, thereby reducing the number of Muslim law courts and "removing one avenue of social advancement offered by the traditional educational system" (20-21).

polyglot authors who speak French, Algerian Arabic (*dārija*), and Amazight.[7] Many of these same authors – including Assia Djebar – belonging to the generation of students who attended French schools in Algeria, are unable to read or write in Arabic with confidence. French therefore becomes the sole recourse for self-expression in writing; to compensate for this, francophone authors such as Djebar integrate Arabic orality into the language of the colonizer as an act of linguistic recuperation or resistance. This creates a hybridity that both celebrates the contact of Arabic and French and reflects the tense, sometimes hostile, relationship between these languages in the context of colonial and postcolonial Algeria.

An example of the dual function of Djebar's "arabized" French can be found in her employment of French and Arabic names for Algiers during the French invasion of the city by sea:

> Quinze années s'étaient écoulées depuis la chute d'El-Djezaïr.
> L'année de la prise d'Alger, naissait la fille unique du caïd "coulougli" de la ville, Si Mohammed Ben Kadrouma.[8]

In this context, El-Djezaïr – which in Arabic refers to both the country, Algeria, and the city, Algiers – is romanized with an accent tréma which indicates that the vowel "i" is to be pronounced separately from "a." This is an attempt to manipulate French diacritics to approximate the hamza glottal stop seated on the yaa letter (الجزائر) in Arabic. The glottal stop in French is rare outside of words stemming from the verb *tenir*, and there is no diacritical marker for glottal stops in French, but Djebar marks the vowel "i" with what is

[7] Désirée Schyns, "How Algeria's Multilingual Condition and Colonial History is Obscured: Marketing Three Postcolonial Francophone Algerian Writers in Dutch Translation," *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology*, 183. Amazight refers to the family of languages and dialects indigenous to North Africa. While not recognized as a national language alongside Literary Arabic and French, Amazight is spoken by 29% of the Algerian population. Amazight is also referred to as Berber in French (and in Djebar's text), a pejorative term derived from the word 'barbarian'. Because of its derogatory connotation, the term will not be used in this project (unless quoted by others).

[8] Djebar, *L'amour*, 120.

available in French orthography. This choice is particularly striking when paired with the next sentence in which she chooses to refer to the capital city by its French name, Alger. This choice also marks the colonial presence of France in Algiers. When named in Arabic, the city is described as having fallen ("la chute"). When named in French, it is taken ("la prise"). The contrast between loss (Arabic) and gain (French) of the city is emphasized visually through the page break between the sentences.

A second example of "arabized" French in Djebar's work occurs in her grappling with the translation into French of the word "hannouni," a term of endearment described as particular to the local dialect of her childhood, "à mi-chemin du berbère des crêtes et de l'arabe de la cité prochaine."[9] As Soheila Ghaussy notes, "Arabic, for example, is described in *Fantasia* as 'oral': it is open and fluid, flirtatious and sensual. Pronouncing a word such as hannouni (my little liver) becomes an experience directly affecting the body […] Language is here connected with the physical, yet the physicality of spelling out, sculpting, and expressing is both desired and resisted in the text simultaneously."[10] Djebar describes the physicality of uttering the word just as she describes the physicality of writing in Arabic from right to left, and the resistance Ghaussy pulls from the text very much reflects Djebar's own discomfort with her perceived lack of ownership over Arabic and inadequacy of French to describe and translate her experience as an Algerian woman.

In *L'amour, la fantasia* Djebar describes her mother tongue as a language of love, reflecting on her inheritance of linguistic and cultural segregation in Cherchell, Algeria. To write of love in Arabic is also to risk, in her words, "d'exhumer des cris, ceux d'hier comme ceux du siècle dernier. Mais je n'aspire qu'à une écriture de transhumance, tandis

[9] Djebar, *L'amour*, 116.
[10] Soheila Ghaussy, "A Stepmother Tongue: 'Feminine Writing' in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian* Cavalcade," *World Literature Today* 68.3 (1994): 460

que, voyageuse, je remplis mes outres d'un silence inépuisable" (to unearth cries, those of yesterday as well as those of the last century. But I only aspire to a writing of transhumance, while I, a traveler, fill my bottles with an inexhaustible silence).[11] She describes a theory of writing grounded in circulation and practices of repetition, revisiting, and variation over time. Transhumance refers to a pastoralism that is seasonal, defined by its movement of livestock between fixed pastures in the summer and winter.[12] This creates an image of the writer as a nomadic "voyageuse" who crosses the same territory repeatedly without settling permanently. Despite the familiarity of the route, variation is inherent to the notion of a seasonal journey as the landscape does not remain static or unchanged. The writer endures this perpetual unsettlement through the replenishment of "un silence inépuisable." Silence is characterized as inexhaustible and fluid, capable of filling the space it occupies. Here Djebar juxtaposes silence, a bottomless resource which ensures the nomadic writer's survival, to the exhumation of voices belonging to those who have died. What is the purpose of such a juxtaposition? How does this metaphor speak to Djebar's literary theory?

As scholars of Djebar have noted, *L'amour, la fantasia* presents a theory of reading which is both described and practiced in the work.[13] In this passage, Djebar is emphasizing the nomadic spirit of the writer perpetually caught between languages, between the individual and the collective, between the past and the present. It is this suspended state between two fixed points that characterizes her writing, one of

[11] Djebar, *L'amour,* 92.
[12] Transhumance within Amazight ethnic groups varies in its degree of nomadism and it is unclear to me which of the two categories Djebar is specifically referring to. Tuareg and Zenaga practice nomadic transhumance. The Chaouis practice fixed transhumance.
[13] Michael Allan, "What emerges is not only a theory of language, but a practice of reading against the grain, one that turns the colonial situation into an optic through which to revisit the past" (195).

circulation - linguistic, musical, and thematic – and impermanence. In terms of language, silence may refer to those gaps in Djebar's knowledge of Arabic or the translation of Arabic to French, French to Arabic. Musically, silence is inexhaustible in that it recurs after each unearthing of a voice, filling the stanzas between each note, each movement, motivating the writer-composer to fill it once more. It also speaks to the magnitude of Djebar's undertaking. For each Algerian voice that she lifts from History, subverting both the silence and the *silencing* practice of the colonial archive, there are those who will never be heard and whose stories will never be exhumed. The writer's task – *her* task - is ongoing.

In many ways, the linguistic situation in Algeria creates a space for authors to resist conventions of "national language" and narrative. Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* exemplifies one characteristic of Algerian francophone literature in which "the process of translation is a perpetual one, and traces of both classical Arabic and the dialect are always present within the French."[14] These traces exist in the manipulation of the French language to correspond with the syntax and rhythm of *dārija* or Amazight. Djebar most clearly undertakes this practice in the organization of *L'amour, la fantasia*, which is a project traversing autobiography, poetry, and archival history. She became a member of the Académie française in 2005 – the first author from the Maghreb to receive this distinction – and in her acceptance speech, Djebar stated that the French language had become her own, adding:

> Je me souviens, l'an dernier, en Juin 2005, le jour où vous m'avez élue à votre Académie, aux journalistes qui quêtaient ma réaction, j'avais répondu que "*J'étais contente pour la francophonie du Maghreb*." La sobriété s'imposait, car m'avait saisie la sensation presque physique que vos portes ne s'ouvraient pas pour moi

[14] Samia Mehrez, "Translation and the postcolonial experience: The Francophone North African text," *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, 135.

> seule, ni pour mes seuls livres, mais pour les ombres encore vives de mes confrères — écrivains, journalistes, intellectuels, femmes et hommes d'Algérie qui, dans la décennie quatre-vingt-dix ont payé de leur vie le fait d'écrire, d'exposer leurs idées ou tout simplement d'enseigner... en langue française. Depuis, grâce à Dieu, mon pays cautérise peu à peu ses blessures.
>
> I remember, last year, in June 2005, the day when you elected me to your Academy, to the journalists who wanted my reaction, I replied that "I was happy for the French-speaking Maghreb." Sobriety was essential, because I had grasped the almost physical feeling that your doors would not open for me alone, nor for my books alone, but for the still vivid shadows of my colleagues - writers, journalists, intellectuals, women and men of Algeria who, in the 1990s, paid with their lives for the fact of writing, of exposing their ideas or quite simply of teaching... in French. Since then, thank God, my country is gradually cauterizing its wounds.[15]

For Djebar, the French language is not only the language of violation, the language of the colonizers. She acknowledges her fellow writers, journalists, and intellectuals who have reclaimed French as a language of self-expression. This act of recuperation is an act which "cautérise peu à peu" the wounds of Algeria's traumatic colonial history because it "strips [the colonizer's language] of its exclusive membership rules, decentering and deterritorializing it."[16] In *L'amour, la fantasia*, Djebar rewrites her history and the history of the French occupation of Algeria through a polyphony of "female voices too long muted in male-dominated histories of Algeria : the half-remembered ululations and tribulations of the narrator's foremothers."[17] She describes her own writing as a reconstitution of "la sonorité de la langue maternelle dans la chair de la langue française" (the sound of the mother tongue in the flesh of the French language).[18] This "langue maternelle" is not *al-fusha* but rather one of the spoken languages of Algeria: *dārija*

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[15] Assia Djebar, *Discours de Mme Assia Djebar.* 22 Jun 2006 (L'Académie Française, Paris, France), 15.
[16] Nada Elia, "The Fourth Language: Subaltern Expression in Djebar's *Fantasia*," *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*. Ed. Lisa Suhair Majj, Paula W. Sunderman, Therese Saliba (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002): 186.
[17] Shaden M. Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghanimi's *Dhākirat al-Jasad*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46.3 (2009): 473.
[18] Djebar, *L'amour*, 84.

whose images, phrases, and rhythm are integrated into French. While she functions as both storyteller and archivist within the text, as a narrator Djebar is uncomfortable with these roles, declaring "Je ne m'avance ni en diseuse, ni en scripteuse. Sur l'aire de la dépossession, je voudrais pouvoir chanter." (I do not advance either as a speaker or a writer. On the site of dispossession, I wish I could sing.)[19] In this statement, she also reveals a yearning for an Arabic that belongs to her. As both "diseuse" and "scripteuse," she works in French. But through music, she can incorporate traces of Algerian *dārija* and Amazight. Inherent in her longing is an acknowledgment that while French can be used to articulate the Algerian experience, it is still lacking in the way Algerian Arabic is not.

Fantasia refers both to the Arabic *fantaziya*, "a set of virtuoso movements on horseback executed at a gallop, accompanied by loud cries and culminating in rifle shots," a performance associated with ceremonial and celebratory occasions in North Africa and to a musical composition marked by its irregularity, its improvisational moments, and the creativity of the soloist who performs it.[20] Djebar entitles the subsections of the third section of *L'amour, la fantasia* as movements of a song ("Premier Mouvement," "Deuxième Mouvement") featuring different voices, a structure which evokes the modulation of Arabic music. [21] Djebar's accumulation of feminine voices within each movement approximates modulation in writing. She pulls the written word into the sphere of orality and demonstrates the way in which the author-as-storyteller preserves memory and gives voice to those who have been marginalized by

[19] Djebar, *L'amour*, 202.
[20] Dorothy S. Blair, trans. "Introduction," *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*. 4.
[21] Modulation is the transition from one *maqam* (a system of melodic modes in traditional Arabic music) to another within a piece (Marcus 171).

tradition (specifically women but in the broader scope of an historical (colonial) archive, Algerians). Djebar functions as both recipient and speaker (much like Aḥlām in Mustaghānamī's *Dhākirat al-jasad* who is both Khalid's addressee and a writer), and in these roles a central preoccupation of hers is linguistic tension between Arabic and French. Djebar articulates at the end of *L'amour, la fantasia*: "L'autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme fiction, du moins tant que l'oubli des morts charriés par l'écriture n'opère pas son anesthésie." (Autobiography practiced in the adversary's language is woven as fiction, at least as long as the oblivion of the dead carried by the writing does not operate its anesthesia.)[22] For Djebar, a lack of mastery in the Arabic script alienates her from her mother tongue and the ancestors whose stories she recounts in "la langue adverse."[23] While French may historically be "la langue adverse" it is also a source of liberation to her as an adolescent.

Correspondence is the consequence of education, Djebar writes, addressing the fears of her village community in the Algerian Sahel: "Toute vierge savant saura écrire, écrira à coup sûr « la » lettre." (Any knowledgeable virgin will know how to write, will surely write "the" letter.)[24] Literacy for young women inevitably leads to the writing of love letters, the content of which is dangerous to the family's reputation. Veiling a daughter's body and restricting her to the domestic space of the home are attempts to render her invisible and limit the social contexts in which she meets others. If she can write, however, "sa voix, en dépit du silence, circule […] Le gardien devra veiller jour et nuit. L'écrit s'envolera par le patio, sera lancé d'une terrace." (Her voice, despite the silence, circulates […] The guard will have to watch day and night. The writing will fly

[22] Djebar, *L'amour*, 302.
[23] Djebar, *L'amour*, 302.
[24] Djebar, *L'amour*, 11.

out from the patio, will be launched from a terrace.)[25] The risk is not in the *savoir*, the knowing, but in the act of writing because "les mots écrits sont mobiles." The mobility of written words indicates travel and allows the speaker's voice to circulate. Circulation implies a relationship between departure (speaker) and destination (recipient) that is non-linear, an exchange that circumvents the physical barriers of the home (windows, doors, and walls). The power, or danger, of literacy is in the reception of the words. For Djebar, too, the distinction between the knowledge and the act links writing to oral storytelling because the *act* denotes an intended recipient, or at the very least, the expectation of a recipient on the part of the speaker.

It is through correspondence that Djebar first experiences (romantic) love at age seventeen, and she describes her father's interception of a letter intended for her from a boy. He tears up the missive in front of her and throws it away without allowing her to read it, a "selective repudiation" that "epitomize[s] the vexed relation of the francophone Algerian writer to the French language."[26] Djebar's father pulls his daughter toward French as a child and deprives her of it as an adolescent, perceiving the love letter as the threat predicted by the village community. His attempt to destroy the missive before it reaches its intended recipient only intensifies its significance for Djebar, who pieces the letter back together and responds to it. This secret correspondence in French liberates her "du cercle que des chuchotements d'aïeules invisibles ont tracé autour de moi et en moi" (from the circle that whispers of invisible ancestors drew around me and in me).[27] As a writer and recipient of French letters, Djebar breaks away from the circle of her ancestors, who enclose her within their linguistic community of whispered *dārija* (or

[25] Djebar, *L'amour*, 11-12.
[26] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 475.
[27] Djebar, *L'amour*, 13.

Amazight). It is whispered in part due to the systemic devaluation of vernacular languages both during and after French colonization. In her adolescence, vernacular Arabic is perceived as restrictive to her and the cloistered girls of her community. She may be a recipient of stories in both French and Arabic but she is more *receptive* to the former as an adolescent. This becomes problematic for Djebar as an adult because she struggles to recapture what was lost to her as a non-reader of Arabic and (to a lesser extent) non-listener of *dārija* in childhood.

In this and subsequent passages concerning correspondence, Djebar considers circulation by drawing attention to the condition of her letter writing. Beyond the question of language, she echoes the reflexivity seen in other maritime writing: an awareness of interactional contexts as transitory and itinerant (and therefore untethered to linguistic convention and standardization), disruption of dominant forms and uses of language, and negotiation between interlocuters that can create new narratives and communities. Djebar presents epistolary writing not only as an author and recipient herself, but also in the lives of three young women, cloistered in their home, who write love letters in French to unnamed recipients. [28] The daughters' correspondence with men goes unnoticed by their father because he is illiterate in French, and Djebar pictures the postman as complicit in their secret.

The narrator describes the vehemence with which the youngest sister speaks of her correspondence and the agency she hopes it will afford her. In defiance of an arranged marriage, she insists, "C'est pour cela que j'écris! Quelqu'un viendra dans ce trou perdu pour me prendre : il sera un inconnu pour mon père ou mon frère, certainement pas pour moi!" (This is why I write! Someone will come into this backwater

[28] Djebar, *L'amour*, 21.

village to take me: he will be a stranger to my father or my brother, certainly not to me.)[29] The motivation to write in French is the desire to be part of, as Fanon describes, "le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage" (the world expressed and implicated by this language).[30] The French words travel "aux quatre coins du monde; du monde arabe naturellement" and it is the path of those words that the youngest daughter hopes to follow.[31] She imagines that a recipient of her letter will remove her from the obligation to pass from one cloistered home (as daughter) to another (as wife). The existence of a recipient to her French letters creates a space for the possibility of freedom from tradition embodied in the figure of the illiterate and pious father. The vernacular languages of *dārija* and Amazight do not travel to the extent that French does, and in reading this passage the words of Bahaa Taher come to mind: a consequence of choosing a vernacular language is the (supposed) incapacity of that language to reach readers beyond the regional or national boundaries where it is spoken. In contrast, French is a language which travels from domestic, religious spaces into public, secular spaces throughout the Arab world.

For the youngest daughter, an intimacy exists between speaker and recipient that insures neither is a stranger to the other. This has little to do with names, or even the content of the letters, but is implied in the act of correspondence between two parties. This intimacy separates the daughters-as-recipients from the rest of the household – those who do not participate in the exchange, or who are unable to do so because they cannot read French – and it also establishes a link between the domestic (confined) space of the women and the public (liberated) space of the men. For Djebar, it is both as writers and

[29] Djebar, *L'amour*, 24.
[30] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 14. Translation is mine.
[31] Djebar, *L'amour*, 21.

recipients of love letters that women transgress the boundaries between private(/feminine) space and public(/masculine) space. Space in *L'amour, la fantasia* is not only gendered but also marked by language. Vernacular Arabic is designated as the language of the harem (and the home) while French is the language of education, politics, and history; this binary is what linguistically remains of the French colonial structure in Algeria. Djebar refers to her father's postcard, in which he addresses his wife as 'Madame' "à la manière occidentale," as a revolution.[32] She utilizes these epistolary episodes to demonstrate the way in which French inserts itself into the Arabic linguistic community in Algeria through women's reception of letters. While the adolescent Djebar may regard French as a tool which enables her to liberate herself from a tradition that she feels is oppressive, it is also invasive and challenging to pre-colonial tradition. Djebar does not allow us to forget that French "enters Algeria as a language of colonial brutality" as the novel progresses and she serves as a recipient (and speaker) of women's voices and the histories of those excluded by colonial records.[33]

By doing so in the colonizer's language, "[Djebar] also intimates that, by the 1990s, the wounds of French had healed enough to make the language 'authentically' Algerian, capable of registering Algeria's sufferings and dreams."[34] In the context of the love letters, French does articulate the dreams of – for example – the cloistered daughters who seek an alternative to their prospective suitors. In this way we can regard the reception of *French* letters or postcards as demonstrative of the language's capacity to register intimate Algerian experiences and feelings. French is also the language which allows Djebar's narrative voice to invoke "both sides of her family […] ancestors distant

[32] Djebar, *L'amour*, 57.
[33] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 474.
[34] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 471.

and close who have contributed to her life and life story, giving us a fuller understanding of her background, of the voices and the words that make her who she is."[35] Djebar claims certain voices as familial but that does not necessarily undermine the sense of an anonymous collective unearthed from colonial archives, and it is this anonymity that allows Djebar to achieve "l'entrelacement onduleux des énoncés de l'auteur (ou, si l'on préfère, du narrateur) et des énoncés des personnages" (the undulating interweaving of the author's (or, if you prefer, the narrator's) statements and the character's statements).[36] The voices she represents are characters based on historical figures and ancestors, and the effect of anthologizing a multiplicity of authorial voices makes Djebar both narrator and archivist.

Djebar engages with the history of French as a "langue adverse" in her rewriting of archival documents dating back to the occupation of Algeria in 1830. She begins with two chroniclers (Amable Mattere and Baron Barchou de Penhoën) of the earliest clashes between French invaders and the Algerian resistance, noting that "la fascination semble évidente de la parte de ceux qui écrivent – et ils écrivent pour Paris" (the fascination seems obvious from the perspective of those who write - and they write for Paris.)[37] Djebar as narrator is not the intended recipient of these accounts whose authorship is always indicated prior to citation. She acknowledges a handful of the thirty-two written accounts, in French, about the initial occupation of Algeria, providing her readership with a sense of the "fièvre scripturaire" which afflicts the French senior officers and

[35] Alison Rice, *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012): 169.
[36] Abdelfattah Kilito, *L'auteur et ses doubles* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1985): 11. Translation is mine.
[37] Djebar, *L'amour*, 28.

subsequently contaminates the rest.[38] This image cannot help but evoke Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'Archive*, whereby the act of compiling of archive is framed as a sickness, a compelled fever. Having described the French colonial archive in this way, Djebar adds that "une telle démangeaison de l'écriture me rappelle la graphorrhée épistolaire des jeunes filles enfermées de mon enfance" (such an itch for writing reminds me of the epistolary graphorrhea of the cloistered girls of my childhood) which effectively downgrades the significance of the French officers' writing, taking away its "essential" authority by juxtaposing the "fièvre scripturaire" of the colonizer to the frivolous "graphorrhée épistolaire" of the cloistered girls she knew in childhood.[39] In drawing comparisons between the French colonial archive and her own childhood experience, Djebar succeeds in broadening the notion of "authority" to encompass the Algerian voices long neglected by History.

Linguistic Pluralism and the Potential for Reconciliation in Aḥlām Mustghānamī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad*

Where Djebar writes in French and grapples with colonial language, Mustaghānamī chooses to write in Arabic. In 1993, Mustaghānamī published her first novel, *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (*Memory in the Flesh*). Five years later she received the Mahfouz Medal, awarded annually to the best recent Arabic novel by the University of Cairo. During her acceptance speech, she positioned herself and other arabophone writers in opposition to the "onslaughts of Francophony" in Algerian literature, referring not only to the legacy of the colonizer's language as a language of violence but also to the internalized anxiety that

[38] Djebar, *L'amour*, 66.
[39] Djebar, *L'amour*, 66-67.

"Arabic is a language not quite 'fit' for the modern novel, that the Arabic novel lags behind its European counterpart."[40] This insecurity stems in part from the origins of the Arabic novel. While poetry has a long tradition in both Vernacular and Literary Arabic, the rise of prose fiction –particularly the novel – is attributed to translators who effectively "imported" European literary traditions to the Arab world during the colonial period. In Algeria, the French occupation directly resulted in a decline in the publication of Arabic literature, which did not experience a resurgence until independence in 1962.[41]

In the same acceptance speech which lauded arabophone writers resisting the temptation of writing in French, Mustaghānamī criticized the Islamist attacks which "had claimed the lives of over sixty of Algeria's writers, artists, and intellectuals for the 'crime' of writing and performing in French, in [Amazight], or even in dialectal Algerian Arabic."[42] This extremism was symptomatic of the linguistic underpinnings of the Algerian Civil War which lasted from 1991-2002. Islamist extremists saw French, Amazight, and *dārija* as threats to Literary Arabic, "a language they privileged both as a living link to the classical Arabic of the Qur'an and as a symbolic opposition to the monopoly of francophone FLN elites on Algerian political and cultural capital."[43] What is most provocative about Mustaghānamī's work, as a multilingual author and in the context of this aforementioned political upheaval and violence, is the recognition of

[40] Tageldin, 470. The source text (untranslated) of Mustaghānamī's acceptance speech has been challenging to recover, but further analysis of "onslaught" is needed in the future. To elaborate further on the historical contextualization of this discussion of the Arabic novel, the "translation movement" (*harakat al-tarjamat*) of the 19th century – which marked Arabic's first encounter with European languages in Cairo and Beirut - was principally concerned with translations of European literary texts into Arabic which "served as a model which was soon to be imitated by local writers who had little to no knowledge of European languages." Sasson Somekh, "The Emergence of Two Sets of Stylistic Norms: In the Early Literary Translation into Modern Arabic Prose," *Poetics Today* 2.4 (1981): 193.

[41] Abdelkader Aoudjit. *Algerian Literature: A Reader's Guide and Anthology.* 2017: 30.

[42] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 468.

[43] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 468.

Amazight and the integration of French and *dārija* into her novels.

While Mustaghānamī views the colonizer's language – French – as a language of metaphorical violence (utilizing the charged term "onslaught" to evoke the image of *francophonie* as an invasion) which cannot represent any authentic Algerian experience, in this moment she embraces all writers who are imperiled by threats of physical violence. As Shaden Tageldin notes, for Mustaghānamī "the living and the dead of literary Algeria, the writer who chooses Arabic and the writer who chooses French, are one in 'martyrdom'."[44] And it is because of this historical context that I disagree with Olivia C. Harrison's critique of *Dhākirat al-Jasad* as an "Algerian" novel (Harrison's own quotation marks) whose incorporation of *dārija* and references to Amazight "[function] as [exoticized markers] of Algerian authenticity in a novel geared toward a Mashriqi[45] audience more familiar with the Levantine dialects."[46] Harrison's argument is predicated on the reading of *Dhākirat al-Jasad* as a text intended for a non-Algerian audience. While this may be true to an extent, and the inclusion of Algeria's various languages does foreignize a text which is otherwise standardized via *al-fusha*, I believe Mustaghānamī's work is motivated less by a desire to exoticize Algeria for a foreign readership than by a desire to disrupt the very language which is being claimed by Islamic fundamentalists to justify violence against artists, writers, and intellectuals producing work in French, Amazight, and *dārija*.

Mustaghānamī's novel moves between France and Algeria, the war for

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[44] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 469.

[45] Mashriqi refers to the region of the Arab world east of Egypt (typically referring to the countries of Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Iraq). Levantine refers to the Vernacular Arabic varieties spoken in the region which are mutually intelligible with one another (but not mutually intelligible with North African varieties of *dārija*).

[46] Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2016. 69.

independence and its aftereffects, and in doing so she brings the linguistic strands of Arabic, French, Amazight, and *dārija* in contact through the interactions and recollections of an artist and a writer. *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, or *Memory in the Flesh*, spans forty years of Algerian history from the 1940s to the 1980s. The story is told from the point of view of Khalid, a veteran of the Algerian War who lost his arm in combat, addressed to the daughter of his former commander, an arabophone novelist known as both Hayat ("Life," the name her mother gave her) and Aḥlām ("Dreams," the name her father gave her). Khalid is introduced to the reader as a revolutionary whose doctor suggests he take up a hobby that will enable him to work through the psychological trauma of the war. Initially Khalid contemplates writing but "given the ignorance of written Arabic to which his colonial education has consigned him, to write would have meant to write in French and thus to enrich French literature."[47] Instead, he opts to paint a series of bridges which serve as an analogy for the postwar Algerian experience. Khalid explains that "some people are born on a suspension bridge. They come to this world between two pavements, two roads, and two continents. They are born in crosswinds and grow up trying to reconcile the contradictions inside themselves. I may be one of those."[48] Khalid's describes himself as a man adrift, existing in the *in between* that characterizes maritime spaces. He seeks out Aḥlām as an anchor, attempting to enclose her, surround her, and hold onto her, only to discover that she cannot ground him. Bridges permeate the text both as images and as metaphors for the relationship of Khalid to Algeria, and the shifting dynamic between Pan-Arabism and nationalism, French, Arabic, and vernacular dialects, the postcolonial present and the colonial past.

[47] Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?", 486.
[48] Aḥlām Mustaghānamī, *Memory in the Flesh*, trans. Baria Ahmar Sreih, 261.

Bridges also invoke the associated image of the sea, which is represented implicitly through Khalid's discomfiting and shifting relationship to time, space, and community. Khalid's association with the sea is explicitly established through his exchange with Aḥlām in the third chapter of *Dhākirat al-Jasad*. She asks him for a glass of water and he responds, "Constantine exploded like a fountain inside me. Drink out of my memory, my lady, until you quench your thirst. All this nostalgia is for you."[49] Thematically, water permeates this text as a metaphor for memory, specifically nostalgia for the homeland, figured as the city of Constantine. Khalid is both treading water as a man suspended between states and a source of water himself, which he longs to share with Aḥlām. Embedded in this desire to "drink" in the memory of Constantine is the question of communication as a means of satiating thirst, leading both the characters and the novel to reflect on the fluid dynamics of Algeria's languages.

In the second chapter of *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, Khalid attempts to reconcile his memories of Aḥlām as a child with his attraction to her as an adult:

> Words were tripping on my tongue that day as if I was talking to you in a language that was foreign to me and a language that was foreign to you. Was it possible to shake your hand after twenty years and to ask you coolly in French, "*Mais comment allez-vous, mademoiselle?*"
> "*Bien, je vous remercie*," you answered in the same distant manner. Memory almost burst into tears. Are you the crawling baby I once knew? My one arm trembles, resisting a great desire to hold you tight and to ask you how you were in that old Constantine accent that I was missing. How are you**,** you who have grown up when I was not looking? How are you, strange visitor, who no longer knows me?[50]

In the source text, the question "Mais comment allez-vous mademoiselle?" ("But how are you, miss?") is striking for two reasons: the juxtaposition of the Latin alphabet and Arabic letters is jarring and while Arabic is read from right to left, French is read from

[49] Mustaghānamī, *Memory*, 53.
[50] Mustaghānamī, *Memory*, 39.

left to right. The English translation chooses to structure the sentences in such a way that the two French phrases occur next to one another. In the source text, the exchange between Khalid and Aḥlām reads:

> أيعقل بعد عشرين سنة أن أصافحك وأسألك بلغة فرنسية محايدة..
> - Mais comment allez-vous mademoiselle?"
> فتردين علي بنفس المسافة اللغوية:
> - Bien… je vous remercie…[51]

Mustaghānamī requires the reader to bridge the linguistic (and visual) gap between Arabic and French by separating the French verbal exchanges with Arabic narration. The effect in reading is a weaving of the eyes from right to left, left to right, right to left, and left to right. The English translation also modifies the punctuation of the French phrases in a way that is distinct from what is found in the source text. The choice to include a comma before 'mademoiselle' and after 'bien' in the English translation gives the impression that the exchange is more natural than in Mustaghānamī's passage. The ellipses in the Arabic text visually represent the "distant manner" in which Khalid perceives Aḥlām's response. This distance is also achieved in both passages by the register of the French question. Both Khalid and Aḥlām use the formal French you 'vous'. Despite the use of italics to mark the inclusion of French as 'Other' in the English passage, the shared Latin alphabet and left-to-right reading practice prevents the translator from recuperating the disconcerting experience of shifting between Arabic and French.

In Mustaghānamī's passage, the first "how are you?" invokes "that old Constantine accent" Khalid mentions as he asks: "واشك..؟".[52] Constantine is the name of both a city and a province in north-eastern Algeria, situating the exchange within a

[51] Mustaghānamī, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, 66.
[52] Mustaghānamī, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, 66.

specific regional context. The question "واشك..؟" is Algerian *dārija* for "How are you?" It is significant that when he addresses Aḥlām as "you who have grown up when I was not looking," he uses the intimate vernacular language of their shared region. In contrast, when Khalid repeats the question, addressing her as the "strange visitor" who does not know him, he uses the construction "…كَيْف أَنت" which is derived from the formal *al-fusha* phrase, "كَيْفَ الحال؟" (*kayfa al-hāl?*) for "How are you?". Between these two formulations of the same question Mustaghānamī creates distance in a two-fold manner, not only in the way Khalid addresses Aḥlām (as "you" or as "strange visitor") but in the language he chooses for his address (*dārija* or *al-fusha*).

Mustaghānamī's decision to repeat the same question in three of Algeria's languages (French, *dārija*, and Arabic) complicates Khalid's recollection that "words were tripping on my tongue that day as if I was talking to you in a language that was foreign to me and a language that was foreign to you."[53] Yes, the 'language that was foreign' is the French of their spoken exchange but Arabic is also structured as a 'foreign language' or a language shared between strangers. The most intimate language in this passage is *dārija*. Aḥlām frequently greets Khalid in Algerian Arabic, referred to by the artist as the "Constantine dialect," and in fact she is associated with every instance of *dārija* in the novel. For Khalid, Aḥlām becomes "a correlative to the Eastern Algerian city, Constantine, and by extension of the homeland Algeria," and their relationship represents Khalid's unresolved feelings towards the country.[54]

Mustaghānamī's thrice uttered question invites the reader to consider the question of translation. In postcolonial studies, translation is complicated by the notion of an

[53] *Memory*, 39.
[54] Ferial Ghazoul, "Memory and Desire," *Arab World Books*.

"original" text because "the definition of such an original is necessarily different from the classic understanding of the term, since the relationship is partial and not whole as only traces of the original can be found in the written text. Also, far from being a concrete or palpable entity, the original is often abstract or elusive, embedded in the oral tradition of the writer-translator's native culture."[55] In the context of Mustaghānamī's novel, the "original" text is multilingual and both characters and readers must negotiate between *al-fusha*, *dārija*, and French.

During a conversation between Khalid and Aḥlām in an art gallery, Mustaghānamī reveals the latter's status as an arabophone author:

> "What language do you write in?" I asked, moving from one surprising revelation to another.
> "Arabic."
> "Arabic!"
> My tone irritated you, and you probably misunderstood what I meant.
> "I could have written in French, but Arabic is the language of my heart. I can only write in Arabic. We write in the language in which we feel."
> "But you speak in French."
> "It's only a habit."
> You continued to examine the paintings.
> "The language in which we talk to ourselves is all that matters, and not the one we use to talk to others."[56]

In the source text, Aḥlām uses the literal word for Arabic, *al-arabiya*, describing it as the "language of [her] heart." She does not designate *al-arabiya* as either *al-arabiya al-fusha* or *al-arabiya al-'ammiyyah* so it is unclear if the language of the speaker's heart is Arabic or *dārija* (though one can logically assume the Arabic she writes is not the vernacular). What is significant about this conversation is that Khalid and Aḥlām are speaking in French (the narration tells us) but Mustaghānamī renders the words

[55] Paul Bandia, "Postcolonialism and translation: the dialectic between theory and practice," *Translation as Creation: the Postcolonial Influence*. Ed. Aline Remael and Ilse Logie. *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 2 (2003): 137.
[56] *Memory*, 56-57.

themselves in *al-fusha*. Ambiguity is preserved throughout this exchange, particularly in the final phrase: "The language in which we talk to ourselves is all that matters, and not the one we used to talk to others." There is a tension in this exchange between what is spoken (French) and what is written (Arabic) but the language "in which [Algerians] talk to [themselves]" is a vernacular. French may be the language of the economic sector and the social elite, and literary Arabic may be the language of formal address, but *dārija* and Amazight are spoken dialects in Algeria. Through Aḥlām, the author is invoking the four languages of her country, even those unspoken in this moment.

Aḥlām's concluding statement, in which she attempts to make peace with the "habit" of speaking French, evokes Frantz Fanon's reflection in Chapter 1 of *Peau noire, masques blancs* when he states that "parler, […] c'est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation."[57] The speech act burdens the speaker with responsibility toward "le poids d'une civilisation," and in the context of postcolonial Algeria one cannot help but read this weight of (French) civilization as an oppressive force. One strategy of distributing that weight is to rely on a recipient. Storytelling demands a recipient for this purpose, because one individual cannot be the repository of an entire community. Aḥlām emphasizes the importance of the internalized language of the speaker, the one he or she "owns," which in this context would be a vernacular Arabic, but she is also a writer of *al-fusha*. I believe there is an unspoken recognition in this passage of the complexity of multilingualism in Algeria.

Throughout the novel, this tension between the imposed language (French) and the language of the heart (Arabic) is present, and one can read Aḥlām's declaration to write in Arabic as an extension of the author's own motivation. There are moments in the

[57] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 13.

text where Mustaghānamī cites verses of Arabic poetry or juxtaposes French and Arabic words, and the novel is wholly preoccupied with writing in and reception of Arabic and French. This preoccupation is shared by Djebar, as both authors interrogate the way language frames Algerian history by producing works that cannot be easily categorized as written "in French" or "in Arabic". Neither neglect the significance of multilingualism to Algeria or of colloquial dialects which are "owned" rather than "mastered" by an Algerian speaker. The linguistic instability that exists in the source texts, resisting the "monolithic reductionism" of practices and politics in both Arabic and French which have attempted (and failed) to render Algeria monolingual and monocultural, results in both writer and reader recognizing the dimensions of its linguistic and cultural plurality untethered to notions of national language or literature.

Civil War and the Destabilization of Language in Huda Barakāt's *Ḥārith al-miyāh*

Both Djebar and Mustaghānamī invoke the sea in a variety of ways: geographically, historically, stylistically. The poetic registers of these novels create opportunities to disrupt, reorder, and blend languages and dialects, revealing alternatives to the "norms of writing back in the critical, resistive political traditions to decolonize French and francophone literary prose."[58] Djebar not only creates, in the spirit of Chinua Achebe's work, a new French but she also reveals social situations in which French and Arabic meet, and the two languages circulate and overlap one another. Mustaghānamī is similarly attentive to the way that registers of Arabic and French, in Elhariry's words, brush against one another. Moments in which languages meet and overlap evoke the meeting of sea and shoreline, of currents coexisting, and of "fractal, mirrored

[58] Elhariry, "Mediterranean Literature?", 84.

perspectives" that characterize the Mediterranean.[59]

Huda Barakāt's *Ḥārith al-miyāh* (*The Tiller of Waters*) occupies the same maritime space as Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghānamī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad* and it, too, draws on poetic registers to dislocate language and to draw Beirut into the currents of the Mediterranean where its histories can be salvaged and its trauma can be acknowledged, not internalized. But the context of Huda Barakāt's Lebanon marks a departure from previous texts analyzed in this project. References to postcolonial violence – including the Eritrean War of Independence, the military dictatorship in Ethiopia, the Algerian Civil War – and conflict are certainly present in the works of Dell'Oro, Ghermandi, Djebar and Mustaghānamī, but the history of the colonial period is also explicitly invoked and subverted in those texts. Barakāt, however, makes no reference to the French colonial period in Lebanon (1920-1943), instead focusing her work on the enduring trauma of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and the way in which "exile at home" manifests in Beirut during this time. The novel is concerned with versions of language – in the Bakhtinian sense – overlapping within the fractured city of Beirut. The ebb and flow of linguistic coherence in *The Tiller of Waters* is directly correlated to the events of the civil war, and the trauma of existing in a suspended state of prolonged fear and violence. Central to much of Barakāt's work is this preoccupation with the (dis)articulation of Lebanese identities during and following the civil war, and the question of an untranslatable experience.

Raised in Beirut, Huda Barakāt studied French Literature at the Lebanese University and from 1975-1976 she lived in Paris while working on a PhD. She decided to return to Lebanon when the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975, working as a

[59] Elhariry, "Mediterranean Literature?", 80.

teacher, translator and journalist. She moved back to Paris in 1989 and published a series of major works. The first, *The Stone of Laughter,* was published in Arabic in 1990, the same year the Lebanese Civil War ended. *The Tiller of Waters* is the third book, published in 1998. A theme often explored in her works is trauma and war, with all three of her novels being narrated by men living in the margins of society during the Lebanese Civil War. In her interview with *Al Jadid*, Barakāt noted that while *The Tiller of Waters* is not autobiographical, "all novels are autobiographic, there is always a part of yourself on the factual level. You find all the 'crumbs' of my life in the novel."[60] The dissolution of the boundaries between fiction and reality are reflected in Barakāt's eschewing of the restrictions of "autobiography," integrating her experiences with those of her characters.

In *The Tiller of Waters*, narrator and textile merchant Niqala Mitri has chosen to stay in Beirut in the midst of the Civil War. The city has turned against itself as Niqala's grappling with this devastation resonates with Barakāt's observation that "the Beirut I needed to make peace with no longer exists […] in my novel, it is the real Beirut, but not the one I knew." Beirut is reconstructed in this novel through Barakāt's collaboration with friends who recalled street names and landmarks of the city. It is a collective memory that Barakāt draws on in her descriptions of Beirut, and this extratextual knowledge intensifies Niqala's isolation in the city as the significance of those street names and buildings is stripped away. He is alone, his fabric store has been leveled, his loved ones are dead or have left the city, and he cannot sleep: "flocks of rapid, nervous airplanes took off and landed endlessly, and the sky above my head was a theater of

[60] "Interview with Hoda Barakāt." *Al Jadid*, Vol. 8, no.39 (Spring 2002).

resounding explosions."[61] The airplanes are described in organic terms, signaling the absence of birds in this war-torn space and the extent to which the ecology of Beirut has changed. The rain is rendered undrinkable by the debris and the ash from fires, which also pollute the Mediterranean coast, and as the narrator wanders into the street to find light for an oil lamp, he hallucinates – out of shock, out of hunger, and out of genuine fear of a pack of wolves that he believes is stalking him.

Niqala's relationship to space and time is disoriented, and the reader shares in this disorientation through passages featuring stream of consciousness style. He describes walking past a souq that he knows, the direction of a mosque, the names of the streets, but he becomes lost. He can no longer recognize the city or any familiar landmarks because of the extent of the destruction. And it in this moment of being disoriented that he begins to hear the howling of dogs. He flees from the dogs and finds shelter on what remains of a small balcony. The next morning he wakes up:

> I questioned myself sternly. Had yesterday's scenes come from my disturbed dreams or been the result of the fevers flaming inside my head? I must be ill, I told myself. And in my delirium I imagined things that had no foundation in fact. But I could not get around one question: why had I scaled this bombed-out building?[62]

The present-day Beirut is incoherent and unstable. To survive the present-day reality of a city in the process of being destroyed, Niqala reconstructs the histories of his family in the context of Lebanon's textile industry, addressing his Kurdish maid and lover, Shamsa, who functions as a stand-in listener. This positions Niqala in the role of Shahrazad the storyteller; he is occupying a place that is gendered feminine, both for the personal(/private/domestic) stories he tells and the burden he bears in preserving familial

[61] Hoda Barakāt. *The Tillers of Waters.* Trans. Marilyn Booth. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001. 87.
[62] Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 51.

and national memories during a time of war. The role of the female storyteller is often conflated with the image of motherhood, and of the additional labor of carrying histories into the next generation. Niqala is occupying this space instead. He is not a participant in the war, he is not contributing to the perpetuity of violence; instead he is tasked with passing down the histories of his family because there is no one left. As Hanadi Al-Samman observes in her book, *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*, "the mode and the purpose of his storytelling are identical to Shahrazad's" in that his motivation is, in part, to keep Shamsa's interest and persuade her to return each day to hear the stories.[63] In some iterations of the Shahrazad's story, she volunteers to marry Shahrayar to protect her sister from execution, and to protect the other women who would also be slain. Shahrazad as a protector of women is also a protector of the nation, in that she is preserving its future. Similarly, Niqala is motivated in part by a desire to protect the memory of pre-war Beirut.

Re-telling stories of the past is a mending act and it is the only control that Niqala can exert over the events that are transpiring. Given that he is a textile merchant by trade, storytelling becomes synonymous with weaving as a means of patching together scraps of memory, of conversations, of images. The threads of Niqala's stories connect the past – both time and space – to the present and fabric becomes the means by which he organizes the passage of time (cotton, linen, velvet, lace, and silk). These natural fabrics serve as markers of time passed, and he traces the histories of Beirut and his family through the

[63] Hanadi al-Samman. *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*, 172. Niqala's role exemplifies one of Barakāt's frequent strategies in setting stories during the Lebanese Civil War. Al-Samman writes with regard to the author's oeuvre: "In these novels Barakāt articulates a framework for pinpointing the causes of Arab citizens' dispossession and consequent alienation. In the process she also manages to question the fixity of gender identification along with socially forced and enforced heterosexual norms." Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure*, 18. Although *The Stone of Laughter*, with its closeted male protagonist, most directly interrogates gender identification, Niqala as Shahrazad accomplishes this as well.

history of fabric, and specifically, the circulation of fabric in the Mediterranean. He describes the city of Beirut as:

> A city that does not advance in time but rather in accumulating layers, a city that will sink as deeply in the earth as its edifices tower high […] Grandfather […] did you grow so passionately attached to cloth because it will not be here when the archaeologists excavate traces of our disappearance?[64]

Beirut accumulates layers in the same way that the novel accumulates layers of fabric and stories. What serves as the crux of Niqala's anxiety in *The Tiller of Waters* is the absence of historical memory during war, or the destruction of that memory. The power of fabric, the power of storytelling, is not that the voice, or the cloth, will endure forever. The power is in its mobility, not unlike the sea, that it can be transported, circulated, modified and passed down.

Barakāt demonstrates the way that fabric travels through a linguistic lens, tracing the influences of European fashion imported to Beirut. In a 2002 interview with the journal *Al Jadid* (A Review of Arab Arts and Culture), Barakāt explained her reason for choosing fabric as the medium for this novel: "We live in a new era where you do not take the time to choose anymore. It is the era of prêt-à-porter […] There is an exchange - the fabrics have transmitted/given something, a profound communication. It is also a critique of modernity, of what is à la mode."[65] The transmission of the fabric is more than the object itself but includes the process of its cultivation and creation as well as its arrival in (for example) the city of Beirut. Barakāt advocates in her interview and the text an attentiveness to the history of each roll of fabric, and the unique path it takes to the merchant and the consumer. Barakāt's critique of "what is à la mode" is particularly salient in the following passage:

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[64] Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 66.
[65] "Interview with Hoda Barakāt." *Al Jadid*, Vol. 8, no.39 (Spring 2002).

> Did you know that the word *moda*, the idea of 'fashion,' originated in the courts of the Italian and French princes, where it appeared between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to popularize very expensive cloth and to spread the habit of wearing it, all to the benefit of commerce? […] Only from the middle of the last century did 'fashion' become a matter of repetitive loss of memory, for that was when the repugnant combinations began, the mongrel blends.[66]

In this passage, the narrator recounts a conversation between his parents, in which his father is offering a critique of mass produced, cheaply made, synthetic materials which come out of this word, 'fashion' and what Lebanon imported alongside this word. He describes the origin of the word 'moda' – fashion in Italian – in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Italy and France, popularizing the use of expensive fabrics in the name of commerce. This is particularly interesting, especially in translation, because in the English edition Marilyn Booth chooses to italicize the word *moda* in English, to signal its Italianness, its foreignness, and the prestige that an English reader will associate with an Italian word. In Arabic, the word is not italicized because it is a loan word (moda is the word for fashion in Arabic as well as Italian). Moda is not the *only* word for fashion, clothing, style in Arabic, there are many, but this is the most common. Barakāt's decision to use this word, and to draw on that history – not only of adopting Italian language but also Italian values and style standards – is very deliberate. In translation, it is very hard to get that same effect, because while in Arabic you read the word 'moda' over and over again, this is a moment where Barakāt reminds us of its relationship to Italy, and to France, the English word 'fashion' does not capture the same prestige. To approximate that prestige, Booth makes the choice to give us the word in Italian. This passage is about exploiting Italianness, or Frenchness, European prestige, to sell product. The inauthenticity of this loanword is what is so appalling to Niqala's father.

[66] Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 40.

And although we may, in the contemporary moment, associate Milan with fashion it is the city of Venice that is most often referenced in this text as Niqala traces the trade route of Venetian lace to Beirut. Historically, the Venetian city state dominated trade on the Mediterranean Sea, a port city on routes linking Europe to North Africa as well as Asia. This influence declined with the unification of Italy, but it is worth mentioning the contemporary relationship between Italy and Lebanon. Post-World War II, Italy and Lebanon signed the first friendship agreement between Lebanon and a European power. In a 1949 log of imports and exports between Italy and Lebanon, Italy's most significant export by far was fabric: cotton, wool, rayon and articles of clothing together totaling more than half of the exports.[67] Italy and Lebanon sustained an economic relationship for twenty-five years, from the end of the Second World War to the beginning the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. The latter event brought about reduced trade and economic relations between the countries, however, Italy has always seen Lebanon as an important partner for increasing Italian economic reach in the Middle East.

Niqala cites more than trade routes, meditating on the very essence of Venice as a physical space:

> To attain lace in its truest form, Venice had to exist. For Venice composed the perfect blend of those essential elements, earth and water, to yield the sort of exceptional beauty that arises from those coincidences whose provenance we cannot fathom no matter how hard we try. Water mingling with dry earth, light with reflections of light; a thing akin only to miracles or sin, and so caught in an ineluctable flight from time. Venice had to exist for lace to become the ultimate luxury that threads could offer […][68]

To return to Barakāt's notion of fabric as a mode of communication, the very construction of lace, the origin of the material from the land, involves imbuing it with

[67] Giampaolo Conte, "Economic Relationship Between Italy and Lebanon in the Fifties," 100.
[68] Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 112.

Venice itself. There is something in the physical space of Venice – in its capacity to bridge two elements, to occupy two worlds - that, for the author, makes it a perfect site for this marrying of earth and water, the delicacy of lace as a fabric. The author's love for Beirut is similarly conveyed through its relationship to earth and water, inviting the reader to consider Venice and Beirut as sister cities.

Venice is revisited later as an integrated port in Niqala's account of the Silk Road.[69] Niqala spends most of his time lingering on silk, not only because it requires such apprenticeship to manage, but because of how it is produced. He likens the storytelling process to that of a silkworm spinning thread, a spinning which is disrupted when the figure of Shamsa – our listener – leaves and he later dies. Niqala never finishes his account of the history of silk, and the novel ends with his disembodied voice, his disorientation and (in an echo of what he had attempted to do while living) a decision to walk down toward the sea and to reorient himself in relation to the water. Disrupting the narrative – through the disappearance of the recipient - is linked to the physical destruction of Beirut. The comfort Niqala derives from telling a story depends on there being someone present to hear it. The novel ends despondently, on a note of disorientation, an absence of familiarity, of being lost. Barakāt has a tendency towards these tones, and speaking on the topic of her endings, she said that they are despondent because they "reflect societies and lives that did not accumulate knowledge, memories, or history." And beyond accumulation, the despair comes for Niqala when it becomes

[69] "The Silk Road epitomized the main sorts of exchanges that occurred over a period of two thousand years from the moment of first contact between East and West, whether by land or sea. At the end of the last century we became one of the route's most important stops. For the sea route began at the China Sea, rounded India, plowed through open ocean to the Red Sea, passed through the Suez Canal and into the Mediterranean, and from there sailed on to Constantinople, Venice and Genoa. The land routes passed through steppes and deserts, coming together at Tashkent and from there heading toward Baghdad, then Damascus and Beirut, and finally Constantinople." See Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 145.

obvious that there is no continuation, no way to transmit this information, because there is no one left.

The question remains: what is the purpose of contextualizing Beirut within this Mediterranean history of commerce and textile production? What does it do to have these traces of Venice in Beirut? According to Dina Amin, "placing Beirut within global history, Barakāt alters the view that the Lebanese civil war is a local issue arising from national conflicts by elegantly placing her country's painful saga within a larger context […]"[70] Barakāt's ability to place the civil war within this global context occurs not only in her ability to connect Beirut to historic trades with China and Italy, but also her attentiveness to language, to the traces of Italian and French in Arabic (because languages circulate too), in the exchanges of merchants, weavers, and storytellers. An awareness of a transnational origin – in language and in dress – makes it difficult to dismiss the civil war as a "Lebanese issue." Instead, Barakāt creates a condition in which the reader recognizes the disruption in and of Beirut – through this "origin story" of the city – as transnational, and of wartime violence as a global tragedy.

In the absence of listener-recipient Shamsa, the novel ends with Niqala setting his sights on the sea, likening his life's work to "tilling the water," and posing a rhetorical question to the specter of his father: "Have I not spent my entire life tilling the water? Isn't that what we always did, father?"[71] Tilling is most commonly associated with the cultivation of the land, the plowing, sowing and raising of crops. There is a definable beginning and end to the process, but for Niqala, the "tilling of water" has been a life's

[70] Dina Amin, "Disorientation and the Metropolis in Hudā Barakāt's *Ḥārith al-miyāh*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 41(1/2): 2010. 108-120. "…and tacitly holding the whole world responsible—in allowing destruction to take place in Beirut, the world community has allowed a rupture to take place within the fabric of human history as a whole. This rupture leads to a discontinuity in history."

[71] Barakāt, *Tiller of Waters*, 175.

pursuit – in part because it can never be done. The sea can never be sown the way that land can; its mobility and its changeable nature cannot be cultivated and controlled. In the history of the Mediterranean region, nations and corporate interests have attempted to "own" maritime space with no success. In the context of Barakāt's Lebanon, it seems that one becomes a tiller of waters when one cannot be a tiller of land, evoking the fragmentation of the nation during times of trauma. The novel itself is inundated with a sense of loss, alienation and displacement that Niqala experiences within his own country as a result of the war.

The devastation of the civil war has uprooted families, generations of the city's inhabitants. In the widespread destruction, the only historical records an individual can preserve are those shared through collective memory. The necessity of both a speaker and a listener to this oral tradition resonates in the works of Djebar and Mustaghānamī, both of whom express a desire to articulate that which has been forgotten. Communication is paramount. To cultivate memory in this way is to till water in the sense that the process is fluid and ongoing, as individual experience and the passage of time reconfigure our recollection of and relationship to the past. In each of these texts, language is conceived of within the same framework whether it be one's shifting identity in relation to French, Arabic and *dārija* in postcolonial Algeria or an exploration of language – loanwords and dialect - as a bridge contextualizing Lebanon's civil war within the global community.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In concluding this project, I look to further contextualize my work – framing articulations of history, identity and language through the sea – in relation to present and future debates on migration and border spaces. To this end, I draw from Pamela Scorzin's edited volume, *Images of Illegalized Immigration: Towards a Critical Iconology of Politics*, and the work of author-activist Igiaba Scego. Scego's work represents the third generation of Italian migrant literature, following the autobiographical texts of the 1990s and transhistorical novels such as Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle.* Scego was born in Rome in 1974, a second-generation immigrant to parents who fled Somalia after Siad Barre's military junta came to power. Many of her works are highly autobiographical and informed by her dual identity as Somalian and Italian. She addresses – as does Dell'Oro's *L'abbandono: una storia eritrea* – Italy's law regarding entitlement to citizenship, which is based on *ius sanguinis*, that is, the right conferred due to a blood relationship to an Italian citizen. Per the 1992 Law 5.91, children of immigrants may become citizens if they have been born in Italy and have documented uninterrupted residence in the country for eighteen years. Citizenship, however, is not guaranteed as "the government may exercise discretion and selectivity in granting citizenship" even if all of the above conditions are met. As a result, children of immigrants are – politically – foreigners in their own country, Italians with residence permits. Even after one has obtained a permesso di soggiorno, Scego wrestles with the question: "cosa significa essere italiano al di là del documento di cittadinanza?" For Scego, to be-at-home is a complex and unstable notion informed by intersections of race, ethnicity, and language.

In an essay published for the Italian weekly magazine, *Internazionale*, Scego

writes that for Europeans, travel is a constellation with endless possibilities, but "per chi viene dal sud del mondo il viaggio è una linea retta. Una linea che ti constringe ad andare avanti e mai indietro."[1] In describing the migrant's journey as a straight line which cannot be deviated from, no matter the danger, Scego reconfigures the Mediterranean Sea, imagining an "altro muro che pian piano cresceva nelle acque del nostro mare."[2] For all that the sea represents the mutability of border spaces, and the potential of redefining roles and relationships within those spaces, Scego speaks of a wall rising up out of the sea, representing not only the physical dangers of the crossing, but a pervasive indifference towards those who undertake that journey. Facing this question of empathy – or the lack thereof – I see much work yet to do at the repeated intersections of maritime margins and border spaces, and to consider, as Sara Ahmed does, "what does it mean to be-at-home."[3]

Thinking through the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean at the present moment, I am also – as a U.S.-based scholar – keenly aware of the Trump administration's geographically-targeted immigration ban and revision of the Statue of Liberty poem to perpetuate the myth of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps. The acting Director of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Ken Cuccinelli, in defense of Trump's penalization of green card applicants who apply for government benefits, stated in an NPR Interview that immigrants "who can stand on their own two feet and who will not

[1] "For people who come from the global South, travel is a straight line. A line that forces you to go forward, never backward." All translations of Scego's essay are by Jim Hicks, with Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Poletto. The translation was published in *The Massachusetts Review* on April 22, 2015.
[2] "… other wall, rising up little by little from the waters of our sea."
[3] Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," 338.

become a public charge" are welcome in the United States.[4] This rhetoric characterizes human beings as a burden on the government, and measures their right to American citizenship according to their potential output, or contribution, to the national economy. Any Marxist scholar can speak to the dehumanization of workers that occurs in a capitalist society that commodifies labor. This is but one example in contemporary U.S. politics targeting immigrants, and it is symptomatic of a pattern that marginalizes and alienates those groups by labeling them as not only unproductive, but as a drain on limited resources, thus positioning them as a threat to the livelihood of others.

Pamela Scorzin writes that mass media has made migrants "highly visible in the sense and form of actually being stamped and stereotyped, as strange and exotic foreigners, into a certain widespread and long-standing cliché, such as the well-known waves and floods of poor, hungry, strange and unskilled dangerous aliens" while simultaneously erasing the humanity and individuality of these marginalized and vulnerable populations.[5] In the decade since Scorzin first analyzed the imagery of the migrant wave – couched in terms that threaten to destabilize and corrupt the nation should the wave be permitted to reach Europe's shores – much has been iterated on the topic of the border spectacle, "these moments and forms of production and of the power-knowledge networks that constitute border regime and give rise to their public image."[6] This project has discussed at length the permeability of border spaces, acknowledging that the perceived fixity of borders is merely an effect of social and political processes

[4] In revising Emma Lazarus' words during his interview on NPR's *Morning Edition* (August 13, 2019), Cuccinelli stated the Statue of Liberty should read: "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge."
[5] Pamela Scorzin, *Images of Illegalized Immigration,* 102.
[6] Eds. Sandro Mezzadra, Nicholas De Genova, John Pickles, "New Keywords: Migration and Borders."

which create the illusion.[7] The constructedness of borders in no way detracts from the horror of those acts of violence perpetrated against the bodies of those who have been deemed trespassers.

The question of empathy, borders, and our relationship to home is further complicated by the ongoing covid-19 crisis. In the United States, the virus has been described in martial terms, defining it as an "enemy" against which we are at war, one that has infiltrated our country. From the inefficacy of restricting travel and closing international borders following the initial diagnosis of the coronavirus to a rise in ecofascist rhetoric ("we are the virus") that refuses to acknowledge the structural inequalities that expose our most vulnerable and marginalized communities to infection, I believe the global response to this moment in time – the coronavirus pandemic – will shape future discussions of migration, border spaces, and the empathic wall.

What comes out of this dissertation is the potential of a more inclusive reading of space and mobility through literature as a form of production, a form of resistance to the aforementioned power-knowledge networks. According to Ahmed, who is herself building off the work of sociologist Avtar Brah, "the lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*."[8] This project has explored the ways in which speakers and listeners leak into each other, languages, histories, and voices, but more can be said on the topic of remaking space and remaking subjects, reconceptualizing locality as that which is established

[7] Nicholas De Genova. Interview with Soledad Alvarez Velasco. "Contemporary Migratory Movements: Between Their Incorrigible Force, the Production of their Illegality, and the Spectacle of Border Control." *Hemispheric Institute*. n.p.
[8] Ahmed, "Home and Away," 341.

through interaction with subjects. As a result, both the subject and the space are influencing one another.

Ahmed conceives of home as a second skin, suggesting a permeable boundary between self and home, home and away. This boundary is foreclosed in time as "'the past' becomes associated with a home that is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present. The question of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present."[9] I read the seven texts at the center of my project as being explicitly engaged with this tension between the temporal and the spatial, and a discontinuity that is exacerbated by historical revisionism, inherited trauma, and political instability.

I also suggest through this project the possibility of co-constructing a sense of belonging in these unclaimed and destabilized places through collective memory, relying not on the individual's relationship to being or leaving but to a community. This sense of belonging permeates the three axes – history, identity, and language – of the project. In the works of Agnant and Ghermandi, characters Emma, Flore and Mahlet curate and reproduce alternative histories of the colonial period through the interactive practice of storytelling. These alternative histories form an itinerant and ongoing thread of collective memory, integrating the alienated storytellers into preexisting and newly formed communities. Pineau and Dell'Oro continue to explore the alienation of exile through their transformative approaches to the *Bildungsroman*. Gisèle and Marianna articulate their own experiences of unclaimed and destabilized identities through their relationships with mothers and grandmothers. Both characters construct a sense of belonging within the liminal spaces between Guadeloupe and France, Eritrea and Italy, and within this self-

[9] Ahmed, "Home and Away," 343.

acceptance there is the promise of renewed growth, mobility, and community.

Both history and identity inform our use of language, which is above all else a highly contextualized and social practice. So what is it stake for Agnant, Ghermani, Pineau and Dell'Oro cannot be detached from the linguistic considerations of Algeria and Lebanon as represented in the novels of Djebar, Mustaghānamī, and Barakāt. The potential of language to disrupt existing power structures and to create a reconciliatory space in which one can feel at home is predicated on the need for an interlocuter, a recipient, a listener. Integrating past and present through the collection and repetition of voices across generations allows these authors to conceive of being-at-home as interactive. This can be a laborious process, unanchored to temporality or space, but my project imagines a communal (re)construction of home and belonging that is always accessible, always open to being reconstituted through the exchange of stories and the circulation of language. It is my hope that further work on the subject of home, belonging, and border spaces can translate to contexts outside of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, allowing us to contextualize regional concerns within a global conversation.

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